Blessed are the children killers: A canonical approach to Psalm 137

by

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DECLARATION

I, Ryu Park, declare that the thesis, “Blessed are the children killers: A canonical approach to Psalm 137”, hereby submitted to the University of Pretoria, for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy has not previously been submitted by me for a degree at this or any other university and I declare further that this is my own work in design and execution and that all material contained herein has been duly acknowledged.

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SUMMARY

The imprecation of Psalm 137, "blessed (אשרי) are the revengers and the killers of infants" (vv. 8-9) does not seem to be in comformity with the broader messages of the *Psalter*, "Blessed (אשרי) are those who delight in YHWH's law (Ps 1:1-2) and who dwell in your house and ever praise you (Ps 84:5)" and of the Old Testament, "Do not take revenge (Lv 19:18) and love your neighbors and foreigners (Dt 10:19)." In order to solve this unfitting nature of the imprecation in the Old Testament, this research utilises canonical-exegetical-theological-literary method. **This thesis undertakes literary-historical study and structural analysis of the Psalm in order to draw out key theological themes and lays the foundation for the canonical reading of the Psalm**. It also attempts to read Psalm 137 in the five books of the Psalter in order to see how the whole Psalter speaks of the imprecation of Psalm 137.

Imprecatory words of the psalmist can be justified by other psalms in the Psalter because the the Psalter speaks of the restoration of the exiled people of Judah by means of the judgment on Babylon. Lastly, this thesis reads Psalm 137 in the canonical context of the rest of the Old Testament passages that show intertextual connections with the psalms in terms of 'imprecation' theme and its related themes (judgment, restoration, etc.) (Dt 32, 2 Ki 8, Is 13, Jr 51, Hs 13, Nah 3).

Canonical reading of the Psalm shows that God has dealt with His people based on the covenant made with Israel at Sinai. The future fate of Israel totally depended on how Israel would respond to the Sinai covenant. While there are messages for Israel, there are also messages for Israel's enemies, especially Babylon. It is emphasized that God would certainly destroy Babylon in order to restore Judah. **Any curse that involved the infants being dashed against rock would not have something Israel was unfamiliar with, because this curse was the consequence of God's judgment in the context of war**.

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Chapter 1
INTRODUCTION

1.1 Actuality and relevance

Because of their ostensibly unfitting nature in the Bible, Imprecatory Psalms have been capturing scholars' academic attention for a long time. Imprecatory Psalms are perhaps the "most perplexing" psalms (Bullock 1985:144), or "a stumbling-block" to many readers of the psalms (Peels 2003:87). Why do imprecatory psalms matter? Imprecation is a synonym for the word curse. This term suggests that the psalmists curse their enemies, that they might be judged and destroyed (Bullock 2001:228). In the psalms (many of them are Individual Laments "of David"), the psalmist asks God to annihilate his enemies, "Let destruction come on him unaware" (Ps 35:8), "Let them be blotted out of the book of the living" (Ps 69:29), "Let his children be fatherless and his wife a widow" (Ps 109:9).[1] Imprecatory Prayer, which is "not a marginal phenomenon" in the Old Testament, is uttered by the psalmist for "revenge on the enemy" (Peels 2003:90).

Certainly the psalmist's imprecations do not seem to be in conformity with the whole message of the *Psalter*. Psalm 1 which sets the "interpretative agenda" for the entire *Psalter*, encourages its readers to pay attention to the Torah (which means "instruction") and live in it because God's Torah is the source of "genuine happiness" (McCann 2008:159): "Blessed (אשרי) is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the ways of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers! But his delight is in the law of YHWH" (vv. 1-2). Psalm 84:5 [Eng. 84:4] reads, "Blessed (אשרי) are those who dwell in your house! They are ever singing praise you! Selah."

However, when we happen to read Imprecatory Prayers, we cannot help but wonder how we should understand them. Psalm 137, the passage of this study, describes the blessed one in a totally different way, "Blessed (אשרי) will be the one who takes and dashes your little ones against the Rock!" (v. 9). How should any reader of the psalms understand the seemingly two

[1] Unless otherwise indicated, (as literal as possible) translations are mine.

extreme opposite teachings/messages of the *Psalter*? On the one hand, the *Psalter* states that blessed is anyone who lives in Torah and praises God. On the other hand, the *Psalter* states that blessed is anyone who dashes his/her enemies' children. Imprecatory Psalms are indeed troublesome because of the harsh prayers against enemies that God may judge and punish them. The problem is that the imprecation is in the psalms, the Word of God, which teaches believers the proper way of praising God and of doing good to others. Cursing others cannot be thought of as the teaching of the Bible. What can be certain is that cursing others is not, should not, ought not be proper behavior intended by God for His worshippers.

Moreover, not taking revenge is a permanent commandment from God as Leviticus 19:18 clearly indicates, "You shall not take revenge or take a grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am YHWH." Here the imperfect with the negative particle לֹא has the syntactical meaning of "permanent command"[2] (Arnold & Choi 2003:62, §63). Moreover, in Deuteronomy 10:19 God commands Israel to love even the foreigners. Imprecatory Psalms certainly seem incompatible with the unchangeable commandment of God. Psalm 137 seems to promote taking revenge and calls those who does so blessed, "Blessed will be the one who repays you with the recompense with which you have done to us!" (v. 8).

Scholars have sought to solve the difficulty of the Imprecatory Psalms for a long time. The very unlikely nature of David's/the psalmist's imprecations has been understood not as David's/the psalmist's own words but as David's enemies' words against David himself (Beardslee 1897:491-92). They have also been understood as sorcery (Mowinckel 1962:49). The imprecations have also been viewed as uninspired (not as equally valuable as other) words of David's own, not of the Holy Spirit (Kittel 1910:142-43). Another suggested solution is that imprecations in the psalms should be understood from the perspective of the Old Testament era, which is different from the New Testament era (Beardslee 1897: 495). Anything good can only be expected in the New Testament time because spiritual life in the Old was inferior to the New

[2] In Biblical Hebrew the permanent (durative, non-specific) prohibition is expressed by the negative particle לֹא with an imperfect verb while nonpermanent (immediate, specific) prohibition by אַל with an imperfect/jussive (Arnold & Choi 2003:130, 137-138, §4.2.3, §4.2.11; Williams 2007:143, 145, §396, §397; Lambdin 1971:113-114, §102). אַל with an imperfect/jussive is a "simple warning" whereas לֹא with an imperfect verb is a "more emphatic form of prohibition" that enforce the divine commands (Ex 20:15)" (Gesenius 1910:317, §107o).

(Beardslee 1897:495). Classical historical figures such as Augustine, Calvin and Spurgeon hold that the psalmist is a prophet proclaiming judgment against the enemies of God rather than a poet (Laney 1981:39). Early 20th century scholars like Briggs and Briggs understood the imprecations at a national level (rather than personal). Thus, the harsh words of the psalmist are in fact spoken against the enemies of the nation of Israel (Briggs and Briggs 1906:xcix).

Psalm 137 is selected for this study because of the very harsh and complicated statement that it contains, "Blessed (*ashrei*) will be the one who seizes and dashes your children against the rock!" What is the basis for the psalmist's curse? What is his view of *ashrei*? Is it contradictory to other *ashrei* passages like Psalm 1, "Blessed is the one whose delight is in the law of the Lord"? Because the Imprecatory Psalms appear to be contradictory to the broader message of the Hebrew Bible, this study will focus on the "imprecation" theme of Psalm 137 first, and then read the Psalm in the context of the entire *Psalter*. Lastly, it will read the imprecation of the Psalm in the context of Old Testament books that contain the imprecation of the death of infants.

1.2 Problem statement

The choice of the Imprecatory Psalms as the topic for this study has been motivated primarily by the fact that the term "Imprecatory Psalm" seems to be an oxymoron. Praising or praying to God in order to curse others certainly does not sound theologically correct.

The choice of this topic is also motivated by a *genre* issue. The questions that need to be answered are as follows: Should Imprecatory Prayer be categorized as an independent *genre*? Or should it be subordinated to Lament Psalms? Thus, the question is: should Imprecatory Psalms be considered as a *genre* like other *genres* of the *Psalter*? This is an issue of classification that goes back to Herman Gunkel, the founder and pioneer of form criticism, and his student Sigmund Mowinckel.[3] Ever since Gunkel, Individual Lament psalms such as Psalms 35, 69, 109 and 137 have also been considered imprecatory (Walton 1978:73). The elements found in each type of psalm seem to fit one another roughly. Can Individual Lament and Imprecatory Psalm be

[3] Gunkel's approach is slightly different than Mowinckel's. What makes difference between them is that the former offered form-critical approach while the latter form-critical approach with cult emphasis (Strawn 2009:10).

used interchangeably? What is relation between the two types of psalms? Frederic C. Putnam (1980:2) has suggested a new sub-category of the psalm, namely "imprecatory laments". This is still an ongoing issue. It is of utmost importance that finding and determining the most likely *genre* of the psalm be the first task because it is essential for Old Testament studies (Wevers 1956:80).

This study is further motivated by the psalmist's usage of the word "*ashrei*" in 137:9, which reads, "Blessed will be the one who seizes and dashes your children against the rock!" Why does it say that those who harm others are blessed? It seems to promote cursing and harming others. A verse like this is difficult to exegete and to understand because the whole Bible even including the psalms speaks of the blessed ones in the very opposite way.[4] For example, Leviticus 19:18 prohibits taking revenge but promotes loving one another. On the contrary, Psalms 84:4[5] describes the one who dwells in the house of God and praises Him as one who is blessed and who loves God and neighbor.

The choice of this topic is motivated by utilising a canonical approach to the Imprecatory Psalms. This has not recently been done and which is somewhat a new methodology compared to historical critical methodologies. This study follows the recent trend in Psalm studies which tends to be holistic. Thus, this study reads Psalm 137 in the canonical context of the *Psalter* and the Old Testament and shows the intertextual connections among which the imprecation theme of the infants being dashed/killed is found.

Finally, this study is motivated by the implication and application of the Imprecatory Psalms. Are the Imprecatory Psalms applicable for Christians today? Should Christians curse others as the psalmists do? If the Imprecatory Psalms cannot be applicable today, what is their purpose? If the Imprecatory Psalms are still applicable, should Christians curse others like the psalmists do? We should be able to answer these questions as we deal with the texts of the Imprecatory Psalms and as we approach the conclusion of this study.

[4] According to Mowinckel, "Curse is the very opposite of blessings, it is blessing with a negative sign" (Mowinckel 2004:48).
[5] "Blessed are those who dwell in your house; they are ever praising you! Selah."

1.3 Aims and objectives

The following are the aims and objectives of this study:

- to do a literature review on the various views on the Imprecatory Psalms and/or imprecations in the psalms throughout history in order to build upon the strengths or weaknesses of foregoing research.
- to do careful exegesis of Psalm 137 in order to grasp the meaning of the imprecations in the canonical context of the Psalms as well as of the rest of the Old Testament.
    - undertaking literary-historical study and structural analysis of the Imprecatory Prayer of Psalm 137 in order to draw out theological themes of the psalm before embarking on the canonical reading of the psalm.
    - reading the Imprecatory Prayer of Psalm 137 in the canonical context of the whole *Psalter* (Book I – Book V).
    - reading Psalm 137 in light of Old Testament passages that contain imprecations of dashing/killing infants in order to see what the passages say in relation to the of imprecations of Psalm 137. Certain passages that have intertextual connections with the imprecation of dashing the infants in Psalm 137 are selected.
- to understand the intent and purpose of the psalmist's usage of the word, imprecation in Psalm 137 based on the canonical reading of the psalm.
- to contribute to scholarship by providing the most plausible and satisfying solution to the problematic nature of the Imprecatory Psalms and/or the imprecations in the Book of Psalms.
- to test the thesis that the Imprecatory Psalm is applicable to modern day Christians.
    - Once a solution to the difficult nature of the Imprecatory Psalm is provided, it will become clearer whether the imprecation of Psalm 137 can be applicable today.

1.4 Research methodology

This study will primarily be a canonical-exegetical-theological-literary study of the Imprecatory Prayer of Psalm 137. The canonical approach is taken because this method has not recently been

applied to the Imprecatory Psalms.[6] Another reason is that, as we will see in later chapters, there are intertextual connections between Psalm 137 and other Old Testament passages in terms of vocabulary, theme and motif. In particular, the phrase "dashing/killing the babies" of Psalm 137 is found elsewhere in the Old Testament (Dt 32; 2 Ki 8; Is 13; Jr 51; Nah 3:10; Hs 13:16). Thus, this study seeks to hear what other biblical passages containing similar imprecations – especially judgment involving the death of infants – say concerning the imprecation of Psalm 137.

This canonical approach is fairly recent in Psalm studies, including the theme Imprecatory Prayer. In the concluding remarks of his doctoral thesis which was published in 2011, Simango has suggested further study on this specific area, "At the level of the study of the canonical setting of imprecatory psalms (or psalms in general), there are very few commentaries that deal with the canonical setting of the psalms, especially the Imprecatory Psalms" (Simango 2011:285-286).

There has been a paradigm shift in Old Testament studies from historical-critical approaches (that is, searching for hypothetical sources behind the texts) and reconstructions of the history of Israel and its religion to canonical and holistic approaches (Howard 1999:330). Inevitably, this shift has also taken place in psalm studies in that scholars have tried to interpret and understand the book of Psalms as coherently and holistically as possible. In short, this approach treats the Psalms as a book. The difference between these two approaches is that the former tends to approach the texts as individual units while the latter treats them as a whole unit. Thus, this study seeks to contribute to the modern trend of psalm scholarship by applying a canonical approach to the imprecatory psalms that has not been investigated before.

The scholars that are mostly mentioned and discussed in one way or another in terms of the canonical approach by other scholars can be roughly divided into two groups of scholars: scholars who put emphasis on the final shape of the biblical canon that is, canonical shape (Childs, Rendtorff and Sheppard), and those who put emphasis on the shaping of the biblical canon that is, canonical process (Fishbane and Sanders) (Callaway 1999:145-147; DeClaissé-

[6] Even though the canonical approach and the Imprecatory Psalms have been researched, application of the canonical approach to the Imprecatory Psalms is not being done.

Walford 2014:2-4, 6-7; Sheetz 2009:21-24; Sheppard 1992:862-864; Soulen and Soulen 2001:29-30).

The first group argues for the "discontinuity between the prescriptural functions of ancient traditions and the new roles they play within 'the canonical context' of Jewish and Christian Bibles" (Sheppard 1992:863), while the second group whose primary methodology is "inner-biblical interpretation" argues for the "continuity between the prebiblical interpretation of normative traditions and the later postbiblical interpretations of scripture in Judaism and Christianity" (Sheppard 1992:863). What they mean is that the former group focuses on the final shape of scripture without paying attention on the process of how the canon was formed while the second group focuses on the canonical process. This methodology section deals with the former group of scholars and then the latter group in order to see how they are similar and different.

1.4.1 Scholars focusing on the canonical shape of scripture

1.4.1.1 Brevard Childs

In the preface of his work, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (1979), Brevard Childs maintains,

> There was something fundamentally wrong with the foundations of the biblical discipline. It was not a question of improving on a source analysis, of discovering some unrecognized new *genre*, of bringing a redactional layer into sharper focus. Rather, the crucial issue turned one's whole concept of the study of the Bible itself. I am now convinced that the relation between the historical critical study of the Bible and its theological use as religious literature within a community of faith and practice needs to be completely rethought. Minor adjustments are not only inadequate, but also conceal the extent of the dry out. (…) This Introduction attempts to offer a different model for the discipline from that currently represented. It seeks to describe as objectively as possible the canonical literature of ancient Israel which is the heritage of both Jew and Christian. (…) [T]he frequent reference to the term 'canonical' is not to suggest that a new exegetical technique is being developed. Rather, the term denotes a context from which the literature is being understood (Childs 1979:15-16).

Likewise, Childs says in his "Reflections on Modern Study of Psalms" (1976),

> I would argue that the need of taking seriously the canonical form of the *Psalter* would greatly aid in making use of the psalms in the life of the Christian Church. Such a move

> would not disregard the historical dimensions of the *Psalter*, but would attempt to profit from the shaping which the final redactors gave the old material in order to transform traditional poetry into Sacred Scripture for the later generations of the faithful" (Childs 1976:385).

In other words, Childs maintains that historical-critical approaches[7] have many flaws in many ways that must be reconsidered for Psalms studies and replaced by a canonical approach that attempts to consider the Psalms in the canonical and final form. Childs recognizes that the canon of biblical literature was formed and developed for a fairly long period from the pre-exilic period to post-exilic by the editors who "exerted an influence on the shaping of the literature as it was selected, collected and ordered" (Childs 1979:77-78). However, Childs maintains that as the editors worked in the process of the "actualization" of the canon, "the original historical setting" was intentionally blurred (Childs 1979:79). Thus, while Childs acknowledges that scripture underwent a canonical process, because the original setting of scripture is almost impossible to retrieve, Childs rather focuses on the finalization of the Bible (Childs 1992:70). Childs calls the final stage of canonization "textual stabilization" or "canonization proper" (Childs 1992:70).

In dealing with the *Psalter*, Childs likewise notes that the final shape of the *Psalter* has vestiges of a "long history of development in both its oral and literary stages" (Childs 1979:511). Childs sees that the evidence[8] is abundant in the *Psalter*: Pilgrimages songs, the collections of Asaph and Korah, "the colophon-like conclusion of Psalm 72: 'the prayers of David, the son of Jesse, are ended'", "the Elohistic editing of Psalms 43-83" (Childs 1979:511). Then, regarding these vestiges, Childs raises a couple of questions to be considered: "What significance can be attributed to these elements of the present form of the *Psalter*? In what way does the final editing

[7] In his work *Old Testament Theology in a Canonical Context* (1986), Childs makes a brief survey of Old Testament studies throughout church history until the 20th century. It was not until the post-Reformation era that Old Testament studies began to be considered as a separate and distinct discipline in the Christian church (Childs 1986:2). One of the reasons was that the circle of German pietism, who resisted scholastic theologians and their philosophical terms and concepts, developed a theology which was based on the Bible (Childs 1986:2). Partly because of the "growing mass of literary, historical, and philological material" and partly because of the "influence of German idealistic philosophy", in the late nineteenth century the historical critical method was dominantly applied to Old Testament studies (Childs 1986:3). For these reasons, as he begins his discussion on the canonical approach, Childs maintains that, "My concern … is to outline a canonical approach to Old Testament theology which, in my judgment, not only presents a fresh approach to the discipline by resolving many of the crucial methodological issues at stake, but also opens an avenue into the material in order to free the Old Testament for more powerful theological role within the life of the Christian church" (Childs 1986:6).

[8] For more discussion of the evidence for the history of the development of the *Psalter*, see "The Canonical Shape of the *Psalter*" in Childs' *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Childs 1979:511-513).

of the *Psalter* testify as to how the collectors understood the canonical material to function for the community of faith?" (Childs 1979:512-513).

Childs (1986:11) discusses these questions in detail, arguing that the *Psalter* must be understood in its final canonical shape. Childs argues, "It is a basic tenet of the canonical approach that one reflects theologically on the text as it has been received and shaped." While historical critical scholarship was a burgeoning area of Old Testament studies, Childs sees that the influence of Gunkel with his form criticism was great, and that there was near consensus among scholars in terms of Gunkel's approach (Childs 1979:509-510). He also sees how other scholars like Drijvers, Gelin and Barth attempted to "bridge the gap between critical exegesis and the actual faith of the church" by applying Gunkel's approach to their own work on the Psalms (Childs 1979:511). However, he argues that even though their attempt was somehow successful (especially Barth), it was "not too helpful" to bridge the gap between their critical approach to the Psalms and its actual interpretation in the modern church. For this reason, Childs (1979:511) argues, "the modern interpretation of the *Psalter* suffers from not dealing seriously with the role of the canon as it has shaped this religious literature."

Childs, thus, deals with certain psalms and groups of psalms (Ps 1 as introduction, the anthological style, the royal psalms, eschatological psalms, the corporate psalms, psalms that have titles)[9] in order to prove that his argument is valid. According to Childs, the original setting that historical critical scholars sought to discover in the *Psalter* is in fact "subordinated to a new theological function for the future generations of worshipping Israel". He argues Psalm 1 as an introduction to the whole *Psalter* indicates "a new theocentric understanding of the psalms in the continuing life of the people of God" (Childs 1979:514). In other words, any psalm that functions for the community has "been loosed from a given cultic context" and "assumed a new role" for the new community in a "different situation" without losing the original meaning (Childs 1979:514-515). The examples Childs provides are found in Psalm 108, consisting of both Psalms 57 and 60, and the prayer of Solomon in 2 Chronicles 6-7, which has citations from Psalms 132 and 136 (Childs 1979:515).

[9] For the details of his argument, see (Childs 1979:51-524).

The following words of Childs show what he tries to maintain with his canonical approach to the *Psalter*, "The canonical shape of the *Psalter* assured the future generations of Israelites that this book spoke a word of God to each of them in their need. It was not only a record of the past, but a living voice speaking to the present human suffering" (Childs 1979:523).

1.4.1.2 Rolf Rendtorff

Another scholar who follows in the footsteps of Brevard Childs is Rolf Rendtorff. In the preface of his work, *The Old Testament: An Introduction* (1985), Rendtorff begins,

> The Old Testament is a collection of writings which came into being over a period of more than a thousand years in the history of the people of Israel and which reflect the life of the people in this period. Therefore there is a reciprocal relationship between the writings or 'books' of the Old Testament and the life of Israel in its history. The understanding of the texts presupposes insights into the historical context and the development of the life of Israelite society, while at the same time the texts themselves are the most important, indeed for the most part the only, source for it (Rendtorff 1985:ix).

What Rendtorff says seems very much the same as Childs's acknowledging that there is a "reciprocal relationship" between a long history of biblical Israel and the writings of Old Testament canon. In other words, despite acknowledging this reciprocal relationship, like Childs, Rendtorff still argues that only the final form of the Bible, not the history of Israel should be paid attention to. Rendtorff's work divides into three main sections. Before dealing with the final form of the Old Testament in part 3, Rendtorff deals with the history of Israel by "outlining the picture of historical developments and associations which the (OT) texts present" in part 1, and by interpreting the Old Testament texts as "expressions of the life of Israel" in part 2 (Rendtorff 1985:ix). Dealing with the first two topics is necessary before considering the final form of the Bible.

In the first part Rendtorff attempts to find the history of Israel by carefully studying the "historical development" as described in the texts of Old Testament in order to reconstruct its "historical development" (Rendtorff 1985:ix). In the second part Rendtorff attempts to see how the Old Testament texts presents the life setting of Israel, its *Sitz-im-Leben*, by means of Gunkel's form critical approach (Rendtorff 1985:ix). Rendtorff applies Gunkel's approach

because it "regards the Old Testament literature as part of the life of the people" and because through this approach anyone can see "the way in which what were originally individual texts became literature" (Rendtorff 1985:ix). In the third part, based on what he has dealt with in the previous parts, Rendtorff deals with the "structure, composition and purpose" of the Old Testament in its final form, which reflects the first part because "the structure of a series of Old Testament books is based on a particular outline of history" (Rendtorff 1985:ix).

In the chapter that specifically deals with the Psalms, Rendtorff maintains that the *Psalter* is the representation of "the final stage of a lengthy history of collecting psalms" (Rendtorff 1985:246). He explains that the *Psalter* as a whole reflects both public (various hyms, lamentations and royal psalms) and individual (lamentations and thanksgiving) worship that was performed in the long history of Israel (Rendtorff 1985:246). Regarding this long history of the *Psalter* as a whole, Rendtorff notes that probably the most famous title for the *Psalter* is "hymnbook of the post-exilic temple" (Rendtorff 1985:246).

Rendtorff argues that the five books of the *Psalter*[10] (Pss 1-41; 42-72; 73-89; 90-106; 107-150), the titles (supercriptions),[11] the doxologies at the end of each book, and the five books "based on the existing subsidinary collections"[12] are evidence of the "final stage" of the long history of the collections (Rendtorff 1985:246-248).

Drawing conclusions, Rendtorff argues that the whole *Psalter* is "futuristic" because the psalms develop towards "*hal*^{e}*luyah* psalms (praise of God)" and "*t*^{e}*hillim* (songs of praise)." Moreover, the royal psalms, "were understood in messianic terms" (Rendtorff 1985:249), are placed in an emphatic position. In other words, the worship of God that was "directed to the past and the

[10] As for the five divisions, Rendtorff explains, "This subdivision is not marked in the Massoretic text; it is probably a later tradition of interpretation in which the five books of the Psalms were considered in analogy to the five books of the Pentateuch. But the sub-division is very formal and partly goes against other groupings of the psalms" (Rendtorff 1985:246-247).

[11] Superscriptions, according to Rendtorff, stem from the final editor of the *Psalter* and reflect "particular situations in the life" of the psalmists (David, Solomon, Moses, Korah and Asaph) (Rendtorff 1985:247).

[12] As for the evidence for the final editing of the psalms based on "existing subsidiary collections," Rendtorff provides the following: "Pss 41; 72; 89 each stand at the end of a larger or smaller group"; "in 72.20, after a detailed doxology there is the note: 'The end of the prayers of David, the son of Jessee', which will once have ended a collection of psalms of David"; and "Pss 42-83 have undergone an 'elohistic' revision; in other words, the divine name YHWH has been replaced throughout (though not completely consistently) with the divine designation elohim" (Rendtorff 1985:248).

present" is also directed to the future because, as Rendtorff says, the *Psalter* (Pss 1, 119) has "become the word of God, which is to be read and meditated on again and again" (Rendtorff 1985:249).

1.4.1.3 Gerald T. Sheppard

Another scholar who follows the canonical approach is Gerald Sheppard, a student of Brevard Childs. As the title of his article, "Canonization: hearing the voice of the same God through historically dissimilar traditions (1982)," indicates, Sheppard embarks on his discussion by noting how both Jewish and Christian scholars "sought to hear a coherent Word of God from their Scriptures" although "the rise of biblical criticism encumbered this activity with historical evidence both of opposition and of enormous variety in the intent of the authors and redactors of the Scriptures" (Sheppard 1982:21).

Sheppard's great interest is to find, in the rise of the biblical theology movement, the holistic reading/hermeneutics of post-exilic Judaism and then discuss these findings in connection with Christians who show related concerns of holistic reading with the New Testament (Sheppard 1982:21). Sheppard argues that what makes the "historically dissimilar traditions" a unified whole is not the literary texts of scripture itself, but certain "hermeneutical principles" (Sheppard 1982:21). He examines three areas for evidence of hermeneutical principles: "1) post-exilic midrash; 2) "canon conscious" redactions of biblical books; and 3) the thematizing of historically dissimilar traditions under the rubrics of "Torah," "Prophets," and "Wisdom." (Sheppard 1982:21-22).

Sheppard notes that by referring to Vayyikra Rabbah 16:4,[13] the rabbis of early and later Judaism attempted to interpret the Torah with parallel passages (like in the Hagiographa) and vice versa, assuming that "Scripture interprets Scripture" (Sheppard 1982:22). Sheppard further notes that especially in later Judaism, all scripture including the oral Torah "communicate[s] the same

[13] Referring to Sid Z. Leidman's *The Canonization of Hebrew Scripture: The Talmudic and Midrashic Evidence* (1976:67), Sheppard notes that Rabbi Ben Azzai (2nd Century) expounded Scripture by "joining passages from the Torah with parallel passages in the Hagiographa" and let "the entire Scripture mutually illuminates the Torah" (Sheppard 1982:22).

Torah which God gave to Moses on Mt. Sinai" (Sheppard 1982:22). Moreover, referring to scholars from the French school, Robert and Renee Bloch, Sheppard understands that midrashic interpretation is not merely "inner-biblical" but a "careful exegetical method of anthological style". This is a style "of re-employing phrases or catch words from familiar biblical texts to construct a new mosaic of instruction upon a given theme" (Sheppard 1982:23). Sheppard's concluding remark on midrashic interpretation is worth noting:

> This anthological midrash reflects an effort to exploit the full recurrences of a theme throughout a given canonical book or within a collection of biblical books. By its very nature this interpretation assumes the same Word of God lies behind all parts of a book or all books in a collection, when historically neither the parts nor the books may have been written with such a consensus of meaning in the mind of ancient authors and redactors (Sheppard 1982:23).

The second piece of evidence for the holistic reading of post-exilic Judaism is "canon conscious redaction", which Sheppard explains as "the attempts by editors to relate one canonical book or a part of a book to some other canonical book or collection of books" (Sheppard 1982:23). He finds evidence of this in the *Psalter*: the psalm titles (superscriptions) and Palms 1 and 2 as introduction to the whole *Psalter*, the five books ending with doxologies (Sheppard 1982:23-24). He notes that it was the late rabbinic midrashic activity that attached "history-like titles" to the Davidic psalms that reflect and depict the parallel narrative of king David in the First and Second Books of Samuel (Sheppard 1982:23). Psalms 1 and 2,[14] he goes on to note, have a dual function in the sense that the psalms create an idea of "polarity" between the righteous (Ps 1) and the wicked (Ps 2)[15] (Sheppard 1982:23). While in Psalm 1 the righteous "meditate on Torah," in

[14] In another work, *Wisdom as a Hermeneutical Construct: a study in the sapientializing of the Old Testament* (1980), Sheppard discusses in detail Pss 1 and 2, "Pss 1 and 2 have been redactionally ordered into a combined prologue to the *Psalter*. Whether or not they belong at the latest stage in the redactional history or to a smaller collection ending with either Ps 42 (e.g., Mowinckel) or Ps 119 (e.g., Westermann), their final role is the same. Pss 1 and 2 correlate the study of the Torah collection with the goal of attaining sacred wisdom like that found in the wisdom traditions, and perhaps in a set of biblical wisdom books. By his associations with Ps 2, David, who is, in canonical terms, the chief architect of the *Psalter* is identified fully in accord with the ideals in Ps 1. The entire *Psalter*, therefore, is made to stand theologically in association with David as a source book of guidance for the way of the righteous. In this fashion, the *Psalter* has gained, among its other functions, the use as a source for Wisdom reflection and a model of prayers based on such a pious interpretation of the Torah" (Sheppard 1980:142).

[15] Concerning this, Sheppard explains, "By implication the demand to read the Torah as a guide to wisdom is what the redactor presupposes to be illustrated by the *Psalter*. This presupposition is made even more explicitly by the close relationship between Ps 1 and Ps 2. The profane nations and rulers in Ps 2 are identified with those who walk the way of the sinners and the wicked in Ps 1. Opposite these, one finds the divine king depicted in the language of Nathan's oracle as one who, by contrastive implication, walks in the way of the righteous. Consequently, David is represented in Ps 2 both as the author of the Psalms and also as one who qualifies under the injunction of Ps 1 to interpret the Torah as a guide to righteousness. David's prayers, therefore, are set forth as having an authority

Psalm 2, the wicked "meditate in vain" (Sheppard 1982:23). Sheppard sees a strong link between the Psalms and the rest of the Old Testament by recognizing how the "prayer of ordinary people" in the First and Second Books of Samuel become the "Word of God" for the later post-exilic community (Sheppard 1982:23). Thus, based on the evidence that "the worldly politics of king David" in 1-2 Samuel becomes the Word of God in the *Psalter* for the later post-exilic community, Sheppard argues that "canon conscious redactions" certainly unite the diverse biblical passages within books or portions of books in Scripture (Sheppard 1982:25).

The third and last piece of evidence Sheppard discusses is that Torah, promise and wisdom function together as a "hermeneutical construct" that attempts to unite the "historically disunified traditions of the Bible" (Sheppard 1982:25-29). According to Sheppard, the way that the Torah appears is a combination of "the Torah treasured by the antecedents of older Jerusalemite priestly groups (Gn through most of the Nm)" and "the Torah maintained by deutero-prophetic groups associated with the deuteronomistic history (Dt through 2 Ki)" (Sheppard 1982:25). Thus, the present Torah in the Old Testament is a combination of two Toroth.

Sheppard first deals with the Torah as a hermeneutical construct. According to Sheppard, the way that the Torah appears is a combination of "the Torah treasured by the antecedents of older Jerusalemite priestly groups (Gn through most of the Nm)" and "the Torah maintained by deutero-prophetic groups associated with the deuteronomistic history (Dt through 2 Ki)" (Sheppard 1982:25). The two versions of the decalogue in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5 and the disordered material of "the legal transactions with the daughters of Zelophehad" found in Numbers 27:1-11 and 36:1-13 are examples for the two groups of Toroth (Sheppard 1982:25). Sheppard explains that the accounts of Zelophead are "probably additions inserted at the time the two Torahs were juxtaposed into the one literary Torah of Genesis through Deuteronomy" (Sheppard 1982:25).

Sheppard holds the opinion that for ancient Judaism, the Torah indicates both "the pentateuch" and the rest of scripture because the Torah consists of "rules of conduct or observance" and

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derivative from the Torah and as a guide to righteous living like that found in the wisdom traditions" (Sheppard 1980:142).

submission to it was "a joyous and saintly act of faith in which one's life was brought into conformity with the design of God" (Sheppard 1982:26). The practice of the Torah as hermeneutical construct is found in the later Mishnah and Talmud. For example, when interpreting any passage in the Prophets or Hagiography in the synagogues, it was the normal practice of homilists to refer to and look at the "appropriate" *halakah* and the Torah in order to come to a haggadic interpretation (Sheppard 1982:27).

Sheppard explains how wisdom, like the Torah, can function as a hermeneutical construct. In the pre-Christian era, wisdom was regarded as the Torah, such that any passage from the Hagiographa or *Ketuvim* could be interpreted in terms of the Torah. One example is found in Proverbs 8:22, "The Lord made me (wisdom) as the beginning of His way, the first of His way, the first of His works of old" (Sheppard 1982:27).

Finally, Sheppard discusses how promise functions as a hermeneutical construct. "Promise" becomes an interpretative lens "through which one can search the entire Scripture (Sheppard 1982:27). The examples Sheppard provides are God's promise made to Abraham and the recurrent theme of exodus, in particular the exiles returning from Babylon by the later prophets. The promise God made to Abraham (Gn 12) "adumbrated the hope present in the narrative of the so-called historical books", and the "exodus" theme in the Book of Exodus "was exploited by the later prophets as a recurrent promise" in order to deliver hope for the returning exiles (Sheppard 1982:27). Sheppard's concluding remarks on this discussion is worth paying attention to,

> My particular interest in these hermeneutical constructs lies in their power to assign a common literary function to unharmonized and historically dissimilar traditions for the purpose of religious edification. Our study has sought to deepen this perspective by a consideration of the new evidence of canon-conscious redactions, which further predisposed such readings in the literature of the Bible, and of use of hermeneutical constructs, which declared the subject matter about which one sought to hear an authoritative Word from God (Sheppard 1982:29).

Having discussed post-exilic Jewish interpretation, Sheppard turns to discuss New Testament scholars' relating the New Testament (NT) to the Old Testament (OT) in order to propose how Christians might "read their Scriptures as a whole" (Sheppard 1982:29).

Sheppard, first, regards that the NT's relation to the OT is similar to post-exilic Judaism's relation to Torah. Just as we have previously seen, post-exilic Jews expressed one Torah which was a combination of two-Torahs in halakhic midrash. Similarly, New Testament Christians have the task of dealing with "one gospel of Jesus Christ amid differing historical resources" in order "to exceed the unharmonized, literary points of departure in the Scripture" (Sheppard 1982:29-30).

Second, Sheppard notes also the similarity between the two. Just as Torah "is the main rubric" for the post-exilic Jews' interpretation of Scripture, Gospel is "the Christian counterpart"[16] (Sheppard 1982:30). Third, the similarity is also noticed in that post-exilic Jews' search for the Torah resulted in the Mishnah and the Talmud, while the Christians' search for the Gospels resulted in "ecumenical confessions or magisterial creeds"[17] (Sheppard 1982:30). Sheppard argues that interpreting Scripture without the above-mentioned approaches was "both engendered by the specific guidelines in Scripture and, at the same time, left unresolved by these same divergent texts" (Sheppard 1982:30). Moreover, Sheppard resists any hermeneutics that do not consider any meanings "in the context of the whole Scripture" and says, "Under a given hermeneutic, one finds in the unresolved or even contradictory character of biblical texts functional ambiguity as to their meaning in the context of the whole Scripture and consequently, a mandate for religious pluralism" (Sheppard 1982:30-31).

Sheppard wraps up his discussion of Jewish and Christian interpretation of Scripture under the rubric of Torah and Gospel, saying that "While the techniques may change, the dominant

[16] Sheppard explains, "Like the Torah reading of the Pentateuch, the Gospel often imposes a function on texts which exceeds their original intent." For instance, Sheppard notes how the gospel of Luke was regarded by, first, Luke himself and then, the New Testament church: "Luke which does not claim to be a Gospel and is closest to a Hellenistic memoir, is read by the church as a gospel in a way that differs from the purpose of its original composition and redaction" (Sheppard 1982:30).

[17] Sheppard notes the similarities between Judaism and Christianity are not in "total agreement and says, "One should not conclude total agreement in the dynamics and structural character of the New Testament and the Hebrew Bible. After all, the New Testament already stands after the conception of a canonical Hebrew Bible. The New Testament is obviously not able to stand on its own but is an additional revelation appended literarily to the Hebrew Bible." However, Sheppard notes the relationship between the Old Testament and the New Testament is somewhat uncertainly distinct: "Either the Gospels, like the Prophets, were commentary on the Torah, or 'the gospel' as the main rubric of Christianity required some justification for its displacement, absorption, or subordination of the Torah." For the explanation, Sheppard refers to the epistle of Gal in which the apostle Paul claimed "a revelation of the gospel in the wilderness independent of the Jerusalem traditions" by going directly to Arabia, not to Jerusalem (Gal 1:15-17) and "rejected the possibility of converted Gentiles observing Torah (cf. Gal 5:2-3)" (Sheppard 1982:31).

hermeneutical construct of Christian Scripture must remain the same: the gospel of Jesus Christ" (Sheppard 1982:33). Thus, having in mind the emphasis on "elements of discontinuity between the prescriptural functions of ancient traditions and the new roles they play within 'the canonical context' of Jewish and Christian Bible" (Sheppard 1992:863), contrarily, there are scholars who argue for continuity between the former and the latter, in other words, between "prebiblical interpretation of normative traditions" and "the later postbiblical interpretations of scripture in Judaism and Christianity" (Sheppard 1992:863).

1.4.2 Scholars focusing on the canonical shaping of scripture

1.4.2.1 James A. Sanders

Among the scholars of the latter group, the first scholar to consider is James Sanders. In his work, *Adaptable for Life: The Nature and Function of Canon*, Sanders (1976:531) maintains that the task of studying canon[18], first, has to begin from the fact that the "concept of canon is located in the tension between two poles: stability and adaptability"; thus, any hermeneutics in biblical studies is a task that falls somewhere between the two. Ever since Semler in the 18th century and up to Pfeiffer in the 20th century, Sanders notes that scholars' main interest was on "stability" rather than "adaptability" (Sanders 1976:532-533). Sanders says that any student of Bible can recognize certain portions of Scripture have been "stabilized"; for example, it is likely that Deuteronomy provided "evidence" for the Pentateuch (Sanders 1976:532).

In the case of the Psalms being stabilized, Sanders explains that the 150 Masoretic Psalms were already stabilized in some sects of Judaism in the second century BC, while they were not yet stabilized in another sects until the first century AD (Sanders 1976:532). He further explains that the stabilization of MT portions of the Law and the Prophets' is "possibly parallel and analogous to the historical pictures for what happened to the *Psalter*" (Sanders 1976:532).

[18] At the time of writing his article around 1976, Sanders says that there was general "consensus on the meaning of canon" among scholars, while there was "discrepancy on how early or how late one may speak of closure of the three sections of the Old Testament." However, Sanders argues, "Standard discussions of canon deal almost exclusively with last things in the canonical process rather than with the early factors which gave rise to the phenomenon of canon as Judaism inherit it" (Sanders 1987:11).

With his term "canonical criticism" Sanders first discusses that the term canon[19] is not so much the length of Scripture but the "nature and function" of Scripture (Sanders 1976:534). Sanders discusses how scholars have defined the Torah (von Rad – "ancient Israel's credo"; Wright – "confessional recitals of God's mighty acts")[20] and he argues that the best definition of it is "Torah story (*muthos*)" for two reasons: first, because Torah is all about "a story, first and foremost, with Yahweh, the God of Israel, as the prime actor and speaker", and second, because this term concerns "a wider range of questions concerning the function of the summaries" (Sanders 1976:535-536).

Under this understanding, Sanders argues that form criticism,[21] which he sees as a useful, but limited approach, "can never stand alone" because it cannot answer "all the questions necessary" concerning literary passages of scripture (Sanders 1976:536). He argues that "form" of any literature "may be deceptive, for the ancient speaker or writer may well have intended to pour new wine into an old wineskin, precisely in order to make a point which literary conformity might not have permitted him to make" (Sanders 1976:536). Thus, he maintains that any serious Bible students need to go beyond form criticism in dealing with any literature of Scripture and find what the "function of a literary piece" might be with canonical criticism he suggests (Sanders 1976:536; 1972:xx).

Sanders, then, discusses that the basic task of canon[22] is to find repetition of "a common or community story" because the history of biblical canon means to function "to inform them who they were and what they were to do even in their later situation" (Sanders 1976:537). Moreover,

[19] Sanders notes that Old Testament studies (late 20th century) faces the issue of "what is in and what is out of the canon" and besides this issue, there is a "tension between the Jamnia mentality and the modern question arising out of the ecumenical movement: what shall we say in answer to the question of what is canonical for church and synagogue today?" The reason why Sanders asks is because Roman Catholicism regards the deutero-canonical books as "authoritative" or "canonical", while Judaism and Protestants do not so (Sanders 1976:534).

[20] For detailed information about the terms preferred by these scholars, see (Sanders 1976:535-536; von Rad 1966:1-78; Wright 1973:57).

[21] In another of his works, *Torah and Canon* (1972), he discusses what form criticism does: "Form criticism is an attempt to make precise observations about the kinds of literature out of which the various units of the Bible are composed. It pressed biblical literary criticism well beyond earlier questions of authorship and composition into prior questions about the smaller literary units which the earliest authors used, and by which the early believing communities (early Israel and early church) passed on the traditions about themselves, and about what they considered important to their identity as believing communities" (Sanders 1972:xi).

[22] Sanders suggests that every Bible student, in dealing with biblical canon, "must probe the fact of repetition – a priori, the first time an idea was taken up again" (Sanders 1976:537).

Sanders maintains that the basic elements of the Torah story, which are "a historical *muthos*" do not derive from forms of the Bible,[23] but derives from a series of histories in the Bible that had communally "existential value" which "functioned for the people in certain types of reflective situations" (Sanders 1976:537). For instance, that the story of Israel's Exodus from Egypt entering into Canaan that passed "from one generation to another" does not mean to provide any forms of Bible but to "provide common need of the community, probably the need to recapitulate their common self-understanding and to transcend a challenge borne to it" (Sanders 1976:538).

Sanders argues that Israel's canon is basically Israel's story made "adaptable" to the next story that awaits them, whether it is a story of fortune or misfortune, and the first story that functions as the "primary authority of Israel's central tradition" is the Exodus (Sanders 1976:538-539). When encountering a new story, each generation of Israel turns to the canonical tradition that was able to 'give life' and 'survival power' to them" (Sanders 1976:540). The canon played the role of providing Israel with life and survival (especially to the generations in the Babylonian exile) continuously until the Torah took its final shape (Sanders 1976:540). Here is Sander's explanation,

> It (canon) can provide continuity within discontinuity because it offers to the community an essential identity which permits the people to adapt. Israel's story undoubtedly served this function many times from her origins until the Torah was shaped definitely in the exile, and the Torah, as we know it, emerged therefrom (Sanders 1976:540).

The adaptability of the canon, Sanders argues, climaxed during the exilic and post-exilic periods because that was when Israel experienced "the impossible and unthinkable" crucible – the destruction of the Jerusalem temple (Sanders 1987:26). In those periods, the prophets of God depended on the "authoritative traditions they inherited from the earlier period" (Sander 1987:24). The messages of the prophets were not always messages of hope in the sense that God would always sustain Israel even in the case that they did evil. The prophets proclaimed the message of judgment against Israel, which was contrary to the message of the false prophets who always announced messages of hope (i.e, Hananiah the false prophet vs. Jeremiah the true prophet in Jer 28) (Sanders 1987:25). The messages of the prophets Jeremiah, Micah, Hosea and

[23] In terms of form in relation with history, Sanders argues that Torah story does not derive from form because a form is something "a historical *muthos*" takes on and this *muthos* can function in various forms (Sanders 1976:537-538).

Amos in particular were messages of judgment ("I will punish you for all your iniquities") based "on the authority of what God had done for Israel in the beginning" ("I brought you up from the land of Egypt") (Jr 28:2-11; Hs 11:1-5; 13:4-8; Mi 6:3-5; Am 2:9-11; 3:1-2) (Sanders 1987:25). For this reason, Sanders explains that the story of Israel especially in the exilic and post-exilic contexts was "adaptable" to the next story and "must be viewed as arising out of the need to keep a stabilized tradition adaptable" (Sanders 1987:25).

Therefore, Sanders maintains that canon involves "adaptability and stability." Ever since the Exodus in the Old Testament, each generation of God's people reads "its authoritative tradition (scripture) in light of its own place in life, its own questions, its own necessary hermeneutics"; thus, scripture is "adaptable" to new contexts (Sanders 1976:551). After all the crises (especially the exile) were over and Judaism was finally "established", Scripture became stable – "the authority of canon" for life (Sanders 1976:551-552).

1.4.2.2 Michael Fishbane

Michael Fishbane shows agreement with the above-mentioned scholars in his dealing with the canonical process. In his article, *Revelation and Tradition: Aspects of Inner-Biblical Exegesis (1980)*, Fishbane discusses that in the rise and in the context of post-Judaism, how the revelation of the Hebrew Bible and the exegetical tradition are related to one another; he argues that the "roots" of post-Judaism's tradition in connection with the Hebrew Bible are found in both the pre- and post-exilic biblical period (Fishbane 1980:343). In order to prove the validity of the relation between the Hebrew Bible and the exegetical tradition, Fishbane deals with the canonical process in three areas: Sinai revelation, homiletical transformation and prophetical oracles (Fishbane 1980:343). He argues that laws are regarded as the divine authoritative revelation because of God's revelation at Sinai (Fishbane 1980:343).

Fishbane is convinced that "an older law" is "supplemented by an oracle-revelation" (Fishbane 1980:344). He provides various examples for discussion of Sinai revelation. One example is sufficient. Fishbane explains in the narrative of Hezekiah's Passover observance in 2 Chronicles 29-30, how the Levites were able to offer burnt and sin offerings while the priests were defiled

and many of them were absent. Fishbane finds a clue in Numbers 9, which is similar to 2 Chronicles 29-30 in terms of verbs and structures (Fishbane 1980:345). Numbers 9 describes how those who "were defiled by touching corpses" "on the journey" and who received an oracle from God through Moses were able to perform the Passover a month later (literally, "in the second month"). In Numbers 9 God spoke to Moses on behalf of those who became unclean by touching corpses explaining how they would participate in the Passover feast a month later.

This message of God is also for their future descendants (v. 10) even during Hezekiah's reign as described in 2 Chronicles 29-30. While Numbers 9 is about "a lay ritual" and "corpse defilement," 2 Chronicles 29-30 is about "a public ritual" and "object defilement" (Fishbane 1980:345). Fishbane sees that "the pentateuchal provisions" in Numbers 9 in which people of God experienced ritual delay due to "corpse defilement" and long journeys was meant to provide a guideline for future generations that facing delay as their forefathers did. Thus, the delayed Passover observance was "applied to a later historical occasion, and also generalized so as to serve the exigencies of a national crises – not simple individual circumstances" (Fishbane 1980:345). As applied, the Levites who were more upright than the few priests (2 Chr 29:34) "had to slaughter the Passover lamb" for the unclean Israelites (2 Chr 30:17). Thus, the original traditions, that is, laws given to Moses by God at Sinai (note that book of Numbers begins at Mount Sinai) are reconstituted as reauthorized laws in 2 Chronicles 29-30.

Second, Fishbane discusses that inner-biblical exegesis can be noticeable in "later homiletical transformations of authoritative texts" in which "epexegetical expansions" take place (Fishbane 1980:351). Fishbane notes that this homiletical transformation of pentateuchal law is found mostly in prophetical books (Fishbane 1980:352). For example, the attribute of God (God of mercy) described in Exodus 34:6-7 is reused in Micah 7:18-20. The prophet Micah took God's attributes and transformed a "revelatory disclosure into a prayerful recitation" (Fishbane 1980:352). Below are Exodus 34:6-7 and Micah 7:18-20 side by side showing how Micah expands Exodus epexegetically:

Exodus 34:6-7	Micah 7:18-20
YHWH, YHWH, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in	Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression for the remnant of

lovingkindness and faithfulness, and keeping lovingkindness for thousands, forgiving (נשא) iniquity, transgression and sin, but he will not hold him guiltless, visiting the iniquity of the fathers…	his inheritance? He does not retain his anger forever because he delights in lovingkindness. He will again have compassion on us; he will tread our iniquities and cast all our sins into the depths of the sea. You will show faithfulness to Jacob and lovingkindness to Abraham as you have sworn to our ancestors from the days of old.

For this reason, Fishbane maintains that the reuse of pentetauchal law passage in the Hebrew Bible "testifies that God reveals His power and presence through historical process" (Fishbane 1980:353). Moreover, Fishbane also notes that another parallel passage to Exodus 34:7 is Exodus 20:7.[24] The verse says, "You shall not take (נשא)[25] the name of YHWH your God in vain, for he will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain" (Fishbane 1980:353). Thus, the description of the merciful and forgiving God who is a God of punishment in both Micah 7 and Exodus 34 is based on the Decalogue in Exodus 20.

Third, Fishbane maintains that the last characteristic of inner-biblical exegesis is "the reinterpretation of prophetic oracles" (Fishbane 1980:354). Fishbane argues that prophetic oracles need to be reinterpreted because they are not yet fulfilled or actualized (Fishbane 1980:354). What God had previously spoken through His prophets[26] remained authoritative and was reapplied in later contexts (cf. Is 16:13-14; Jr 29:17-20). The reinterpretation of prophetic oracles is specifically found in the exilic and postexilic periods. For example, "the realization of preexilic doom oracles was proof positive of the power of YHWH to fulfill the oracles of deliverance offered to His weary and trust-less people" (Fishbane 1980:355). In other words, the community of Israel in the exilic period seeks to see how God would eventually restore them based on the prophetic words of promise that God had previously spoken through the prophets;

[24] Fishbane explains that the exodus from Egypt is "considered the paradigm-event of national salvation, and so set the pattern for redemptions to come (cf. Is 11:11-16; 43:16-20; 51:9-11; 52:12; 63:11-12; Jr 16:14-15; Mi 7:15). The reuse and transformation of the exodus typology in Isa 19:19-25 is particularly remarkable" (Fishbane 1980:353-354).

[25] The original Hebrew word for English words "to take" in Ex 20:7 and the "to forgive" in Ex 34:7 are the same which is נשא.

[26] In order to prove his argument is valid, Fishbane refers some Scripture passages especially in the Prophets; "I swear by Myself that an oracle of salvation has come from My mouth which shall not fail" (Is 45:23); indeed, as rain falls and does not return to heaven, says YHWH, "so will the word which comes from My mouth not return to Me empty – but will do My will and fulfill my command" (Is 55:10-11) (Fishbane 1980:355). It is worth noting that Fishbane translated the Hebrew word, "דבר" "an oracle of salvation" in order to emphasize his argument.

in the end, at the moment of restoration and after the prophecies are fulfilled, the community of Israel in the post-exilic period will be able to praise God and give thanks to him for salvation. The examples are abundant. The first example Fishbane provides is God's message that He would punish Israel at Babylon's hands for seventy years in Jeremiah 25:9, 11-12 (pre-exilic). This passage "was deftly reformulated" in 29:10, so that after the seventy years is over God would punish Babylon in order to restore (post-exilic) Israel (Fishbane 1980:356). Another example Fishbane provides involves the books of Zechariah and Ezra. In Zechariah, the angel questioned when God would restore Israel from exile (1:7; 7:1-5) (Fishbane 1980:356). In addition to the restoration of Israel, Ezra speaks of the restoration of the temple (Ezra 6:14) (Fishbane 1980:356). In light of Zechariah and Ezra, Jeremiah's oracle of restoration became "twofold: Judea and the temple" (Fishbane 1980:356).

In his extensive work, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (1988), Fishbane discusses the canonical process of new texts using older texts in terms of *traditum* and *traditio* (Fishbane 1988:5-19). *Traditum* is the tradition of older texts; *traditio* is the process of transmission in a newer community. According to Fishbane, *traditum* (the content of tradition),

> Was not at all monolithic, but rather the complex result of a long and varied process of transmission, or tradition. At each stage in the traditio, the traditum was adapted, transformed, or reinterpreted – be this by the use of old cult legends for retelling the life of a patriarch, or the integration of traditions into major literary complexes, like the Book of Genesis as a whole (with its diverse patriarchal materials and prehistorical prologue). Materials were thus detribalized and nationalized; depolytheized and monotheized; reorganized and reconceptualized (Fishbane 1988:6).

Thus, Fishbane maintains that because *traditum* is not fixed, the so-called *traditio* groups of the later generations can insert their thoughts and comments into the (con-)texts of the *traditum*. In short, Fishbane's approach focuses on the process of the Bible's being canonized rather than the finalization of the canonization of the Bible. His usage of the terms *traditum* and *traditio* (Fishbane 1988:5-19) is reminiscent of Sanders' terms homegrown tradition and borrowed tradition, as we have previously seen.

It has been seen that there are two types of canonical approaches: canonical shape and canonical process. In their explaining the difference between the two, Soulen and Soulen argue, "Contrary

to Sanders, Childs does not seek to determine the hermeneutics employed in the canonical process. His primary concern is not with any particular editorial layer but rather with the final resultant product" (Soulen & Soulen 2001:30). Likewise, DeClaissé-Walford discusses how Childs differs from Sanders, "But Sanders disagreed with Childs' assertion that it was useless to try to understand the underlying layers of tradition that constitute a text. According to Sanders, biblical texts are grounded in historical settings. Those settings can be discovered, and they are important for understanding the shapes of texts" (DeClaissé-Walford 2014:4). Moreover, Callaway explains that according to Sanders, canonical criticism approaches the scriptures in "the hermeneutics of the communities adapting the tradition" while according to Childs, it approaches the scriptures in "the shape of the canonical text" (Callaway 1999:147).

As previously mentioned, there has been a paradigm shift in Old Testament studies from historical-critical approaches to canonical and holistic approaches. The differences can be found in the issue of whether canonical criticism is a continuation of the historical critical approach in terms of methodology (Xun 2010:162). While Childs, who rebuts the historical critical approach, suggests a new canonical approach, Sanders sees that canonical criticism is a continuation of the historical-critical approach (Xun 2010:162). For this reason, in terms of discussing the term, Sanders embraces the term, canonical criticism that he first coined as a continuation of previous methods of historical criticism while Childs rejects the term and rather chooses to use canonical approach because, as for Childs, the canonical approach is not like any previous historical critical method (Xun 2010:162). Concerning this, Xun says, "Unlike Childs, however, Sanders finds that 'canonical criticism' can be viewed as a part – albeit a rather complicated part – of historical criticism" (Xun 2010:162).

1.4.3 Gerald Henry Wilson

Generally speaking, while there are differences between Childs' and Sanders' approaches, there is an attempt of combining and considering them as one approach. In reviewing Gerald Henry Wilson's *The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter* (1985), Sanders notes that Wilson's approach "represents a good amalgam of those worked out by both Childs and myself" (Sanders 1987:321). Thus, Wilson's approach is an "amalgam" of Childs' and Sanders' approaches. In his work,

Wilson argues that "there is evidence within the Hebrew *Psalter* itself of an editorial movement to bind the whole together" and also argues, "the unity achieved by this process is not merely a convenient combination of disparate items into an 'accidental' formal arrangement, but represents the end result of purposeful, editorial organization" (Wilson 1985:4). DeClaissé-Walford explains how Wilson's work is a combination of those of Childs and of Sanders: "the *Psalte*r is a unified whole (à la Childs), and is the end result of purposeful activity (à la Sanders)" (DeClaissé-Walford 2014:7). Because of amalgamation of Childs' and Sanders' work, deClaissé-Walford calls Wilson's work "a new approach" (DeClaissé-Walford 2014:2-3).

Without doubt, as scholars note, Wilson is the most influential scholar on the final shape[27] of the *Psalter* because of his work, "The Editing of the Hebrew *Psalter*" (Wilson 1985; Bullock 2001:58; Craigie 1983:30-31). Wilson, a student of Brevard Childs, was the first scholar who applied[28] the canonical approach to psalm studies by comparing the Masoretic *Psalter* with Mesopotamian Hymnic literature (Sumerian temple and the Catalogues of Hymnic Incipits) and the Qumran Psalms manuscripts[29] in order to see if there was "a purposeful unity to the Hebrew *Psalter*" and argues that the *Psalter* "had been redacted to represent a developing sequence of ideas" (Koh 2010:177; Wilson 1985:1-61).

In his work, Wilson seeks to accomplish two major tasks and concerns. The first task is "to isolate and describe what evidence exists of activity within the *Psalter* and to determine the extent of its unifying influence" (Wilson 1985:5). The second task is to determine "the editorial purpose which governs the organizational process" (Wilson 1985:5). The first task is what is now called "shape" of the *Psalter* and the second one is "shaping" of the *Psalter* (DeClaissé-Walford 2014:7). In this way, Wilson's approach is a combination of both the shaping (Sanders) and shape (Childs) of the *Psalter*.

Of the five Books of the *Psalter*, Wilson deals with Books I-III first and then Books IV-V because especially the last chapters (Pss 2, 41, 72 and 89) of the first three Books reveal an

[27] In fact, Childs is the first scholar to use the term, "shape" in identifying "the distinctive features of biblical books when they are read as scripture" (Sheppard 1992:864).
[28] In fact, it was Brevard Childs who initiated the canonical approach to Psalm studies, but it was later developed by Wilson (Koh 2010:178).
[29] For detailed information on Wilson's comparative study, see (Wilson 1985:1-61).

"interesting progression in thought regarding kingship and Davidic covenant" (Wilson 1985:209). Throughout Books I-III, Wilson notices the establishment (Pss 2, 89), security (Ps 41) and failure (Ps 89) of the Davidid Covenant and God seems to delay in restoring Israel from exile. This led the psalmist to exclaim, "How long YHWH?" (Ps 89:46) (Wilson 1985:209-214).

Throughout Books IV-V, Wilson also notices the theme "YHWH is king (YHWH malak)" (Pss 93, 96-99) in the exilic and post-exilic hope for Israel (Wilson 1985:214-228). Wilson explains with the "exodus" theme how God has delivered Israel out of Egypt (Pss 90, 92) (Wilson 1985:216-217). Wilson concludes with the following words, "YHWH is *eternal* king, only He is ultimately worthy of trust. Human 'princes' will wither and fade like the grass, but the steadfast love of YHWH endures for ever" (Wilson 1985:228).

1.4.4 Canonical approach and biblical theology

Based on what has been discussed so far, the canonical approach needs to be discussed in connection with the discipline of biblical theology as we summarize the characteristics of the canonical approach. It has also been discussed how the canonical approach is different from historical criticism; the scholars of the former (especially Childs and those who agree with him) seek to interpret scripture holistically unlike the scholars of the latter.

According to Klink and Lockett, there are five types of biblical theology and the canonical approach is one of them (Klink & Lockett 2012:21-25). In their book titled, *Understanding Biblical Theology*, they provide a very helpful chart that represents all five types of biblical theology. The chart shows that biblical theology is a discipline that covers what is "more historical" and what is "more theological" between two poles (Klink & Lockett 22). Canonical approach is both historical and theological; however, it tends to be more theological because, according to the chart, it stands right before the last (the fifth) type of biblical theology, that is, "theological construction" (Klink & Lockett 22-25). Here is the chart drafted,

History……Theology				
Type 1	Type 2	Type 3	Type 4	Type 5
Historical Description	History of Redemption	Worldview-Story	Canonical Approach	Theological Construction[30]

This might be explained with an example of a pendulum that oscillates from one extreme to the other. Let us imagine that the left extreme is history and the right extreme is theology. The pendulum is pulled back to the left extreme, that is, history, and released, and it swings through its equilibrium point and stops somewhere between the equilibrium ('worldview-story') and the right extreme ('theology'). Thus, it can be argued that the canonical approach tends to be more theological and yet somewhat historical.

As we have seen in the beginning of this section, a paradigm shift took place in Old Testament studies as well as in Psalm studies from historical criticism to canonical and holistic approaches.[31] Based on the aforementioned discussion especially on the nature of the canonical approach, authority is situated in the canonical texts and theological meaning is found within the scripture itself (Callaway 1999:147). In other words, an attempt to find meaning in the scriptures takes place within the canon of scripture without recourse to any "theological or philosophical systems" (Callaway 1999:147). Thus, the canonical approach is part of biblical theology in that it combines history and theology and yet is close to theology. For this reason, Childs says, "There is no one hermeneutical key for unlocking the biblical message, but the canon provides the arena in which the struggle for understanding takes place" (Childs 1986:15).

Because there is "no one hermeneutical key" for biblical interpretation, the canonical approach as part of the discipline of biblical theology, as Hasel correctly mentions, is to provide "summary explanations and interpretations of the final form of the individual OT writing or blocks of

[30] For more detailed information about all five types of biblical theology, see (Klink & Lockett 2012:22).
[31] Gerhard Hasel explains that Old Testament Theology is distinctive from the history-of-religions approach, "which emphasizes the relations of the Israelite religion with those of the surrounding world of religion." Moreover, Hasel explains that the history-of-religions approach is a history of the transmission of tradition" that is "uninterested or unable to present the theology of the final form of the OT texts" while OT theology is able to present the theology of the final form (Hasel 1991:112).

writings that let their various themes, motifs, and concepts emerge and reveal their relatedness to each other" (Hasel 1991:112). By providing a summary of "various themes, motifs, and concepts", the canonical approach does not allow any approach that depends on one theme, motif or concept (Hasel 1991:112). Hasel offers a good literature review of various scholars' quests for the central theme/motif/concept of the OT theology. The findings vary: "covenant (Eichrodt, Wright)," "election (Wildberger)," "communion (Vriezen)," "promise (Kaiser)," "the kingdom of God (Klein)," "the rulership of God (Seebass)," "holiness of God (Hänel)" "experience" of God (Baab), "God is Lord (Köhler)" (Hasel 1991:139-160).

Among the scholars influenced by Childs, David Clines calls for a canonical approach. His thesis is this:

> The theme of the Pentateuch is the partial fulfillment – which implies also the non-partial fulfillment – of the promise to and blessing of the patriarchs. The promise or blessing is both the divine initiative in a world where human initiative always leads to disaster, and are an affirmation of the primal divine intentions for humanity (Clines 1978:30).

Throughout his work, Clines tries to show that the promise or blessing is the key word that plays a significant role and holds the Pentateuch and the whole Old Testament together. Likewise, James Nogalski applies the canonical approach to the Minor Prophets. Nogalski develops his thesis by examining "catchwords" throughout the books of the twelve Minor Prophets: "judgment on the nations and eschatological promise of salvation" (Jl, Am and Ob), "supremacy of Zion" (Ob and Mi), "crimes of Edom" (Ob and Jnh), and so on (Nogalski 1993:21-275). Similarly, Raymond C. Van Leeuwen focuses on theodicy in the Twelve, investigating how the scribal redactors use the pentateuchal text in order to create a theodicy (Van Leeuwen 1993:32-33).

1.4.5 Conclusion

This study will utilise mainly the methodology of canonical scholars. In dealing with reading the *Psalter* in its final shape, this study will generally utilise Wilson's approach by reading imprecations within the *Psalter* (ch. 4); in dealing with the imprecation of Psalm 137 within the rest of the Old Testament canon, this study will mainly utilise Childs' approach. This is because

the task of this study is to see how the theme of imprecation and its related themes (punishment, judgment, retribution and so on) found in Psalm 137 are related to the whole *Psalter* and the rest of the Old Testament. It is also to see how the theme of "dashing the babies against rock" can be understood within the canonical context of scripture. The point is to hear what the whole scripture says concerning imprecations involving the death of the babies as described in Psalm 137:9.

Having completed the literature review, this study will offer an exegetical-literary-historical study and structural analysis of Psalm 137 in order to identify key words, themes and concepts (imprecation, judgment, revenge) that play a significant role in the psalm (ch. 3), in the rest of the *Psalter* (ch. 4) and the rest of the Old Testament Canon (ch. 5). A literary-historical work on Psalm 137 is a necessary and rudimentary step before embarking on a canonical reading of the psalm. It sets the thematic foundation (ch. 3) for a canonical reading of the imprecatory psalm (chs. 4 and 5). Thus, the approach of this study is also theological because it investigates related themes and motifs of imprecation both in the literary context of Psalm 137 and in that of the rest of the Old Testament.

Thus, this study seeks to find how the canonical approach might solve the difficult and seemingly contradictory nature of the imprecation of the psalm. In the next chapters, by applying a canonical approach to the psalm, we will be able to hear what the canonical text itself (the whole *Psalter* and the rest of the Old Testament) says about the imprecation.

While the canonical approach is normally utilised by scholars like Childs in both the Old and New Testaments, this study will, however, limit[32] itself to the Old Testament. It is certain that from the perspective of the canonical approach, the New Testament texts "unfold great bodies of truth which lie beyond the scope of the Old Testament" (Lehman 1971:144). However, because the expression of the harshest imprecation, "dashing/killing the babies" appears only in the Old Testament (Dt 32:25; 2 Ki 8:12; Is 13:15-18; Jr 51:20-23; Hs 14:1; Nah 3:10), this study limits

[32] Likewise, a scholar like Geoffrey Miller limits his canonical study to the Old Testament and leaves canonical study in the New Testament to New Testament scholars because NT scholars also deal with issues that are dealt with by OT scholars, and he believes that "a summary of studies in New Testament intertextuality would yield similar results" (Miller 2010:284).

itself to the canonical studies on imprecations within the Old Testament. Specifically, this study will mainly deal with the texts that have intertextual connections in terms of themes, words and motifs with the text of Psalm 137, specifically the imprecation concerning dashing the enemies' babies against the rock (v. 9).

1.5 Hypothesis

The hypothesis of this study can be formulated as follows:

Reading the Imprecatory Prayer of Psalm 137 in the canonical context of the five Books of the *Psalter* and the Old Testament books that show intertextual connections (Dt 32:25; 2 Ki 8:12; Is 13:15-18; Jr 51:20-23; Hs 14:1; Nah 3:10) proves that the psalmist's imprecation against his enemies ("blessed are the killers of children and the revengers") is not contrary to the broader message of the *Psalter* ("Blessed is the man who delight is in the law of YHWH") and the Old Testament ("love your neighbors and do not seek revenge"), but is in harmony with it.

1.6 Chapter division

The scheme of this research is divided and developed as follows:

Chapter 1 introduces the study and describes it by delineating the actuality/relevance, problem statement, objectives, the research methodology and hypothesis.

Chapter 2 is a literature review. Various scholarly interpretations of the Imprecatory Psalms and imprecations in the psalms are surveyed, reviewed and examined. Each scholar's contributions and limitations are also discussed. This chapter concludes with the suggestion that the canonical approach solves the difficult nature of the imprecatory psalm, which other approaches/methods failed to do.

Chapter 3 is a careful and exegetical study of Psalm 137 in order to find the meaning of *ashrei* ('blessed is…') used in the context of Imprecatory Psalms. This psalm is chosen because the text

contains the harshest language of imprecation in the Old Testament. This chapter seeks to find the reason the psalmist speaks in a way that sounds the very opposite of the larger message of the Bible, especially as it is found in the Pentateuch: love your neighbors/foreigners and do not take revenge.

Chapter 4 reads Psalm 137 in the canonical context of the whole *Psalter* (from Book I – Book V) – first, in the nearer context of the psalm and then in the broader context. By doing so, the difficult nature of the Imprecatory Prayer of the psalm can be understood in the context of the whole *Psalter*.

Chapter 5 reads Psalm 137 in the canonical context of the Old Testament outside of the *Psalter*. The passages that have intertextual connections with psalm 137 in terms of themes and motifs – specifically, the imprecation theme of "dashing/killing the infants" – are selected for this chapter. By doing so, the difficult nature of the Imprecatory Prayer of the psalm can be understood in the context of the Old Testament.

Chapter 6 constitutes the conclusion. This chapter summarizes the works of the previous chapters. By summarizing the previous discussions, this chapter lays out the most satisfactory solution to the difficult nature of the imprecatory prayer. This chapter deals with the question that was raised in the introduction of this study; the question is how to solve the tension between the imprecatory psalms, "blessed are revengers and children-killers" and God's commands, "love your neighbors (foreigners)" and "do not take revenge." Lastly, this chapter considers whether the Imprecatory Psalm that involves the death of infants is applicable for Christians today.

1.7 Orthographical remarks

1.7.1 Introduction

The adjusted Harvard Reference Style is used for this style. Abbreviations of books of the Bible will be listed as recommended by NTSWA English.

Unless otherwise indicated the Bible translation is my own. The English Standard Version (ESV), the New American Standard Version Updated Edition (NASB), the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttegartensia* (BHS) and the transliteration of the BHS are utilised.

1.7.2 Abbreviations

The following abbreviations have been used in this study:

AB	The Anchor Bible
ABD	Anchor Bible Dictionary
ANETS	Ancient Near Eastern Texts and Studies
AMP	The Amplified Bible
ANESS	Ancient Near Eastern Studies Supplement
AOAT	Alter Orient und Altes Testament
ASV	American Standard Version
AThANT	Abhandlungen zur Theologie des Alten und Neuen Testaments
BDB	A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament
BHS	Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia
BJ	Bible de Jérusalem
CBQ	Catholic Bible Quarterly
CEB	Common English Bible
CSB	Christian Standard Bible
DBI	Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation
DI	Deutero-Isaiah
ESV	English Standard Version
FAT	Forschungen zun Alten Testament
GKC	Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar
HAT	Handbuch zum Alten Testament
HALOT	The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament
HCSB	Holman Christian Standard Bible
HICOT	Historical Commentary on the Old Testament

HOL	A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament
HUCA	Hebrew Union College Annual
ICC	International Critical Commentary
ITL	International Theological Library
JAOS	Journal of the American Oriental Society
JBL	Journal of Biblical Literature
JM	P. Joüon and T. Muraoka (tr.), *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*
JNSL	Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages
JAOS	Journal of the American Oriental Society
JPS	Jewish Publication Society
JSOT	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament
JSOTS	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series
KB	The Hebrew & Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament
KJV	King James Version
LXX	The Septuagint
MT	The Masoretic Text
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NET	New English Translation
NIDOTTE	New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis
NIV	New International Version
NKJV	New King James Version
NLT	New Living Translation
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
OTL	The Old Testament Library
RGG	Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart
RSV	Revised Standard Version
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature. Dissertation Series
SBLMS	Society of Biblical Literature. Monograph Series
TDOT	Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament
TgPss	Targum of Psalms
TLOT	Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament

TNK	*Torah*, *Nebi'im*, *Kethubim*
TWOT	Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament
VT	Vetus Testamentum
VTS	Supplements to Vetus Testamentum
WBC	The Word Biblical Commentary
WMANT	Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament
ZAW	Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft

1.7.3 Terminology

Certain terms have been used in this study:

Abrahamic covenant – Abrahamic covenant is an unconditional covenant that God made with Abraham. Out of the passages of the Abrahamic covenant (Gn 12, 13, 15, 17 and so on), the covenant in Genesis 12 needs to be emphasized in this research because it contains both blessings and curses. God calls Abraham establishes a covenant with him with seven provisions: (1) "I will make of you a great nation, (2) and I will bless you (3) and make your name great, (4) so that you will be a blessing. (5) I will bless those who bless you, (6) and him who dishonors you I will curse, (7) and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (vv. 2-3, ESV). What can be known from this passage is that blessings and curses are closely associated with a covenant.

Blessing and curse – Like curse (imprecation), blessing is a key theme or concept found in the Bible. Bible characters like David pray that good or beneficial things would happen to others. The word, blessing often appears with the word "cursing" in the Bible. The first occurrence of these two words is Genesis 12, which is known as the passage of the Abrahamic covenant, which says "I will bless those who bless you, and those who curse you, I will curse" (v. 3ab). The blessings and curses are found throughout the Bible. Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 27-28 are passages that deals thoroughly with curses and blessings. Like in Abrahamic covenant in Genesis 12, the curses and blessings in this passage is associated with the covenant. Leviticus 26 and

Deuteronomy 27-28 describe the covenant obligations that Israel should follow and keep; blessings will follow those who keep the obligations, but curses will follow those who fail to do.

Canonical approach – The canonical approach is an approach rather than a criticism for reading and interpreting the Bible holistically. Scholars differ from one another regarding how to focus on the biblical canon: whether on the canonical process (Fishbane and Sanders) or on the final, canonical shape (Childs, Rendtorff and Sheppard). The final canonical shape of the Bible is the end result of the long activity of the canonical process (Wilson).

Imprecation – Imprecation, a synonym of curse, appears often in connection with the theme of blessing throughout the Old Testament. Curse is the consequence of disobedience attached to the Mosaic covenant (Lv 26; Dt 28-29). The Old Testament is replete with the "curse" theme as the consequence of disobedience that fell upon Israel. The "curse" theme is also found in the prophetic oracles, according to which Israel and Israel's enemies might be destroyed by God (Is 13; Jr 51; 2 Ki 8; Hs 14; Nah 3). It is also found in the Psalmist's laments, in which the Psalmist wants Israel's enemis to be cursed and destroyed by God (Pss 17, 59, 109, 137, 140).

Imprecatory psalm – An Imprecatory Psalm is what this study seeks to deal with because this term implies that the psalmist in Psalm 137 prays with cursing words that God would bring judgment upon the Babylonians. The imprecation that the psalmist uttered is indeed troublesome because the judgment he asks of God involves the death of the infants.

Intertextuality – Intertextuality is an attempt to interpret the meaning of a text in light of other related texts and to see how the meaning of the text is shaped by other related texts. Because many Old Testament passages show intertextual connections with the imprecation of Psalm 137, this study attempts to read the psalm in light of the passages containing the theme imprecation.

Judgment – In this study, judgment is the expected outcome whenever Israel, God's people breaks the commandments of the covenant God established at Sinai. Moreover, God's judgment against the enemies of God and His people is also an expected outcome. Because by means of judgment against the enemies, God establishes restoration/salvation for His people, it is not

surprising that judgment against the enemies is found in the prayers of God's people hoping that they would be utterly destroyed.

Oracles against nations (OAN) – Oracles against nations are series of oracles found in the prophetic books (Is, Jr, Ezk, Am, Ob and Na). The oracles are addressed to neighboring nations of Israel and Judah and communicate that the nations are soon to be the objects of God's judgment. OAN show the sovereignty of God over all nations (Assyria, Babylon, etc.), that the nations that God once used as the instrument of punishment against God's chosen people become the target of God's judgment.

Zion and Jerusalem - Zion is the place that God chose as His dwelling place. Zion is Jerusalem. This place is where the people of Israel gather and worship God. Zion is a significant place because it is the place the exiled people reminisce upon (Ps 137) and they are eager to worship God back in Zion. Zion is the mountain where God made a covenant with Israel (Dt).

Inviolability of Zion in Zion tradition – Because Zion is where God is worshiped, the Israelites had faith that the place indicated God's presence and protection. The concept that Zion is either inviolable or indestructible was widespread among the Israelites because of the continual teaching of the false prophets that the covenant God made with Israel at Zion was unconditional and permanent, no matter how the people might behave. Eventually, contrary to this teaching, Jerusalem was destroyed.

Chapter 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

Over the centuries there have been various attempts to interpret the difficult nature of the presence of the Imprecatory Prayers in Psalms (Pss 37; 69; 109; 137; 139). This chapter covers how the Imprecatory Psalms have been interpreted in scholarship. The purpose of this chapter is to see if any interpretation suggested by each group of interpreters provides a satisfactory solution before embarking on an interpretation of our pericope, Psalm 137. Because the purpose of a literature review is a critical and in depth evaluation of the literature related to selected area of study, this chapter will deal with each interpretation suggested by various scholars and then show the strengths and weaknesses of each interpretation. This chapter will conclude with the suggestion that a holistic, thematic, and canonical approach should be utilised in order to go beyond the previous, and unsatisfactory solutions.

2.2 Literature review of imprecatory psalms

2.2.1 Dispensational approach

The first school of interpretation is the dispensational approach. One of the key doctrinal features of this school is the sharp division between the Old and New Testaments, that is, between Israel and the church.[33] According to this school, there is a "sevenfold scheme of dispensations" throughout the Bible. They are the dispensations of "Innocence, Conscience, Civil Government, Patriarchal Rule, Mosaic Law, Grace and Millennium" (Ryrie 1995:62). The first four dispensations are found in the Old Testament. The fifth one, the Mosaic Law runs from Exodus 19:1 to John 14:30, and the sixth and seventh ones belong to the New Testament (Ryrie 1995:54).

[33]Charles C. Ryrie, well-known scholar in dispensationalism, explains about the distinction as follows, "Israel is addressed as a nation in contrast to Gentiles *after* the church was established at Pentecost (Ac 3:12, 4:8, 10; 5:21, 31, 35; 21:28). In Paul's prayer for natural Israel (Rom 10:1) there is a clear reference to Israel as a national people distinct from and outside the church. (…) In addition, believing Jews and believing Gentiles, which together make up the church in this age, continue to be distinguished in the New Testament, proving that the term *Israel* still means the physical descendants of Abraham" (Ryrie 1995:127).

Because the responsibilities God requires from His people differ in each dispensation (by and large, old and new dispensations) in order to achieve salvation from God, the ethical conduct differs as well (Ryrie 1995:54). Specifically, God's command, "love your neighbor" has a different meaning in each dispensation. In the old dispensations, love your neighbor means exclusively "love your neighbor." Because of its exclusiveness, God's command cannot go beyond loving one's neighbor. There is no room for loving enemies; loving enemies is something that cannot be expected (Pauls 1993:76). But in the new dispensations, it is inclusive. This means God's people are to love even their enemies who do evil to them. A. F. Kirkpatrick, a proponent of the dispensational approach explains,

> [The imprecations] must be viewed as belonging to the dispensation of the Old Testament; they must be estimated from the standpoint of the law, which was based upon the rule of retaliation, and not the Gospel, which is animated by the principle of love (Kirkpatrick 1982:lxxxix).

In sum, according to his view, Old Testament ethics are inferior to New Testament ethics, since Jesus came to the world to fulfill the Law and the Prophets "by raising all to a higher moral and spiritual level, expanding and completing what was rudimentary and imperfect (Mt 5:43; 19:8; Lk 19:8; Lk 9:55)" (Kirkpatrick 1982:lxxxix).

However, his argument can easily be refuted because even in the Old Testament God commands His people to love and care for even their enemies. For example, Exodus 23:4-5 shows that God commands the Israelites to love their enemies by returning their animals that wandered away. Likewise Proverb 25:21 shows that the Israelites are to show hospitality to their hungry and thirsty enemies with food and drink. Moreover, God's command, "love for enemies" is present in Leviticus 19:17-18. The dispensational approach does not provide a satisfactory answer to the hard nature of the Imprecatory Prayers. This approach makes the Bible contradict itself. Johannes G. Vos who argues against dispensationalism as a "false and unwarranted scheme of Scripture interpretation" maintains,

> Because (it is) the attempted solution of the problem of the Imprecatory Psalms virtually makes Scripture contradict Scripture. According to this interpretation, a thing which was right for David is wrong for us today since the moral law, while during the dispensation of grace it gives way to a different principle. Thus one part of Scripture is set over against another part of Scripture in such a way that the different parts virtually contradict each other (Vos 1942:125).

Therefore, the dichotomy of the Old and New Testaments in the dispensational approach cannot be held as a strong and valid argument. In no sense can the problematic issue of the Imprecatory Psalms be said to be resolved with this approach. The dispensational approach in fact makes the issue worse.

2.2.2 Imprecation as inferior ethics

The second school of interpretation is related to the dispensational approach in the sense that the Old and New Testaments are strongly separated from one another. In contrast to the New, Old Testament ethics fall "below the religious standard" (Lehman 1971:440; Oesterley 1937:218; Pfeiffer 1948:639). Likewise Patrick Boylan argues that the imprecations must be understood with "the imperfect character of the Old Dispensation as compared with the New" (Boylan1921:lxiv). Old Testament ethics can be fully understood only in the light of the New Testament, particularly the teaching of Jesus because of the "progress of divine revelation" (Lehman 1971:440). Jesus' Sermon on the Mount teaches how Jesus' teaching of the law and the Pharisees' perverted teaching differ from one another in order to lead God's people from "spiritual immaturity to a larger understanding of divine truth" (Lehman 1971:440). Thus, gradual and progressive revelation is the clue for the hard nature of Old Testament standards (Davies 1892:158).[34]

McKenzie rightly argues against this approach as inadequate for two reasons First, because the scholars of this view are not even clear about what they mean by imperfect morality: are Old Testament ethics good, less good ("than a more perfect morality") or bad (McKenzie 1994:83)? McKenzie argues that the imperfect morality of these interpreters must be "bad" because "love for one's enemies is a percept not of the Christian positive law, but of the divine natural law" (McKenzie 1994:83) and second, because the imprecations "proceed from the less enlightened conscience of the writer" (McKenzie 1994:82-83).

[34] Davies explains the gradual and progressive revelation of the Old and the New Testament ethics as follows, "The spirit of Elijah, who called fire from heaven to destroy his enemies, is not the spirit of Christ. There was an old dispensation with all its distinguishing features. It is impossible to understand the two Testaments without emphasizing the fact that God spoke 'by diverse portions and in diverse manners,' before speaking finally through the Son" (Davies 1892:158).

This approach cannot be held valid for the following reason. Like the New Testament, even the Old Testament requires the Israelites to show "fairness" and "consideration" to their enemies as they do to their neighbors whom they love. God's commands to love enemies and not to take revenge, but rather be kind to them is scattered throughout the Old Testament. Because of this reason and as already mentioned in the previous section, the separation between the Old and New Testaments is not a strong argument.

2.2.3 Imprecation as messianic prophecy or prophetic prediction

The Imprecatory Prayers have been interpreted as prophetic predictions or messianic prophecies. This understanding probably began with the Church Fathers (Luc 1999:398). In his exposition of Psalm 109, St. Augustine begins with the following title, "A solemn introduction to this messianic psalm: the era of promises and the age of fulfillment" (Augustine 1990:261). This title is followed by the editor's comment saying that this (Imprecatory) Psalm is "formally messianic in both Jewish and Christian tradition" (Augustine 1990:261). The editor continues, "Augustine's solemn tone in the introduction prepares his hearers to consider its central importance" (Augustine 1990:261). Augustine exposits Psalm 109 from a messianic perspective.

The imprecations spoken by the psalmists are not their own "personal sentiments" but "divine announcements" against their enemies (Bullock 2001:230; Luc 1999:398). Likewise Herbert Lockyer suggests, "It is better to consider them not as imprecations but as predictions" (Lockyer 1993:446). The psalmists' imprecations against their enemies describe things that will happen in the future, not at the moment of speaking. The key method utilised by this school is the New Testament writers' use of the Old Testament. This school understands David as a prophet, who prefigures the Messiah in the New Testament (Luc 1999:398). The scholars of this school find support in the New Testament passages in which David is referred to as a prophet (Ac 2:30, 4:25), and in Peter's speech to the crowd in Acts 2, David is prefigured as the Christ who is to come. James Adams argues that the psalms must be messianic because there are no human beings except Jesus Christ who are able to imprecate their enemies (Adams 1991:35). Because the imprecatory prayers made by David and other psalmists had to be fulfilled through Jesus the Messiah, their imprecations (whose role was prophetic) were permissible. For this reason, the

psalmists' imprecations are first, personal and then messianic in terms of the fulfillment of the prophecy. What makes Adams' view unique is that these "messianic" imprecations cannot be our own "personal" prayers like they were for David and other psalmists because of their messianic and prophetic nature (Adams 1991:21). What Adams means is that David and the other psalmists' imprecations were meant to be fulfilled through Christ the Messiah (and indeed they were fulfilled!) but our imprecations are not supposed to be fulfilled because our imprecations are merely imprecations.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a well-known German Lutheran theologian and martyr of the Nazi era, discusses this issue.[35] Bonhoeffer's view on the imprecations is basically the same as Adams' view. Bonhoeffer argues that because king David is the king chosen and anointed by God for his people, Israel, he is the prototype of the Messiah, Jesus Christ, to come and that "What happens to him happens to him for the sake of the one who is in him and who is said to proceed from him, namely Jesus Christ" (Bonhoeffer 1970:18). Thus, the words of David are the same words of the future Messiah; the prayers David made will be the same prayers the future Messiah will make (Bonhoeffer 1970:18). For this reason, just like Adams, Bonhoeffer argues that we Christians are not allowed to imprecate our enemies through prayers like David did because we are "too sinful, too evil for it" (Bonhoeffer 1982:467). But despite the prohibition of cursing others, the reason David, who was sinful like us, imprecated his enemies is because God prepared "in David" Christ the Messiah "who will be called the Son of David" (Bonhoeffer 1982:468), and when David prayed, he did not pray "out of the personal exuberance of his heart, but out of the Christ who dwelled in him" (Bonhoeffer 1970:18). For this reason, David's imprecations are exceptional and excusable. But Christians' imprecations are not.

In order to support their arguments, these scholars refer to quotations of the Imprecatory Psalms in the New Testament, especially in contexts speaking of Jesus Christ (Bullock 2001:230ff.). For example, the word of hatred is quoted by Jesus in John 15:25 saying, "But the word that is written in their law must be fulfilled, "They hated me without cause", which was already spoken by David in Psalm 35:19. Moreover, speaking of the suffering of Christ in his epistle to the Romans, the apostle Paul quotes from Psalm 69:9 and says in Romans 15:3, "the reproaches of

[35] For his discussion on the Imprecatory Psalms in detail, see (Bonhoeffer 1970:17-21).

those reproach you have fallen on me."[36] It is true that David is described in the prototype of the Messiah to come. But as Day well explains, finding typological meaning in Christ only, not in David loses sight of the "immediate and archetypical significance" of David in his original and historical context (Day 2002:61). It is unthinkable that the meaning of the Davidic Imprecatory words cannot be known until the second coming and the cross of Christ (Day 2002:61).

That Imprecatory Psalms are "strictly future" is the problem of this view because it ignores the significance of the historical and original contexts of the Imprecatory Psalms. Criticizing this approach, Bullock says, "But this denies the historical situation, and if divine revelation is to make sense, we cannot ride roughshod over history. It is the receptacle of revelation" (Bullock 1985:145).

Many psalms certainly contain prophecy but that does not necessarily mean that the Imprecatory Psalms are prophetic. Moreover, arguing against the Imprecatory Psalm as prophecy does not necessarily imply the denial of the messianic Psalms that contain prophecy of the coming Messiah (Pss 2, 8, 16, 22, 34, 35, 40, 41, 45, 68, 69, 89, 102, 109, 110, 118). For this reason, this study seeks to show that Imprecatory Psalms can be applicable for the church today without denying the prophecies in the psalms.

2.2.4 Imprecation as effective magic or curse

Without doubt, the influence of form criticism, developed by Herman Gunkel and modified by Sigmund Mowinckel with a cultic emphasis, has been dominant in Psalm studies (Clements 1976:63).[37] A leading scholar of the religious-historical school, Gunkel's form criticism seeks to

[36] More instances of the New Testament's quotation of imprecatory messianic Pss are found in Ps 69:22-23 quoted in Rm 11:9-10, and Pss 69:25 and 109:8 quoted in Ac 1:20.

[37] Concerning the influence of form criticism, Rudolf Smend maintains, "No scholar had so deep an influence on the methods of biblical exegesis in the mid-twentieth century as Hermann Gunkel, an influence reaching far beyond the borders of Germany." (Smend 2007:118). Likewise, Mark S. Gignilliat maintains, "Herman Gunkel's significance in Twentieth-century Old Testament studies cannot be overstated. Technical terms that exegesis students learn in their first or second semester of the studies, such as *Sitz im Leben* (situation in life), form criticism, and *genre* criticism, are bound to his name. His influence on Old Testament studies is such that one cannot engage the scholarly literature on the Pentateuch, the Pss, and, to a lesser extent, the Prophets without encountering his name as a major interlocutor" (Gignilliat 2012:79).

identify the small form or *genre* of a psalm and the psalm's *Sitz-im-Leben* (life setting) according to its oral tradition (Clements 1976:12-13). Gunkel identifies it by means of comparing Ancient Israel's religious setting with its neighboring Ancient Near Eastern nations (Clements 1976:79-80). Gunkel was aware that there was "continuity" between "the religion of the Old Testament" and "the religious life of Mesopotamia and ancient Egypt" (Clements 1976:13). Gunkel and Mowinckel understand of the imprecations as "one piece with the larger context of the religious and cultural climate" of both the Ancient Near East and Israel" (Mennega 1959:9). Thus, because of their comparative approach to the Old Testament, Gunkel and Mowinckel suggested that the Imprecatory Prayers are "magical curses", which were practiced by Israel's pagan neighbors (Mowinckel 2004:48-49).

Charles Foster Kent, a proponent of form criticism, explains the Ancient Near East's influence on Israel saying that the Imprecatory Psalms are not "the highest products of Israel's faith" but rather reflect the "survival of the ancient belief that a curse had a certain potency in itself" (Kent 1914:238). Likewise, Theodore H. Robinson says that the imprecations actually originated with the enemy and that the psalmist wishes the curse back on the enemy "in boomerang fashion" (Robinson 1969:139-140). However, Robert H. Pfeiffer argues against this idea of effective magic, saying that there is no reason to follow Gunkel and Mowinckel's argument and assume that "enemies threatening the Pious with sickness, ruin, and death were sorcerers casting over them spells of black magic" (Pfeiffer 1948:639). The reason for his argument is that Pfeiffer refers to the identity of the enemies of the psalmists. The enemies are not sorcerers who cast black magic on people who eventually experience all kinds of evil, but they "were wealthy Jews of the higher classes, lax in observance of the Law, somewhat skeptical with regard to God's intervention in human affairs." (Pfeiffer 1948:639).

Another reason that this argument should be rejected is because that black magic is "forbidden to the Israelites in his strife against his enemies" (Keel 1996:85). There are many references indicating that magic is forbidden. For example, Leviticus 19:26 says, "You shall not practice divination or magic!" Deuteronomy 18:10 reads, "Let no one be found among you who makes his son or daughter through fire, one who practices divination, one who practices magic, or interpret omens, or a sorcerer." Exodus 22:18 reads that the consequence for sorcery is death,

"You shall not allow a sorceress to live." Syntactically the commandments of God using *lo'* with the imperfect as in the above mentioned references suggest "a permanent prohibition of a general nature" (Williams 2007:143, §395). Practicing magic was indeed a taboo that the Israelites could not even think of committing.

Moreover, as Putnam explains well, the historical setting and date of the Imprecatory Psalms does not support the idea of the imprecation as magic because many were dated in the early monarchy in which true monotheism – worshipping God only was settled. Thus, "they (Imprecatory Prayers) are outpourings of the heart of men to the true God", and so cannot be considered as formulas or incantations (Putnam 1980:15-16). For these reasons, Gunkel's interpretation of the Imprecatory Psalms is not a satisfactory solution because the Bible does not support it, but rather speaks against it. Indeed form criticism was proposed and popularized by Gunkel and his followers for a long time in order to overcome the weakness of source criticism by considering the *Sitz-im-Leben* of Old Testament pericope for proper interpretation. But relying heavily on the *Sitz-im-Leben* turned out to be unsatisfactory. Thus, getting a satisfactory answer supported by biblical text is the reason for this research.

It does not mean that this research exclusively rejects the benefits and advantages of form criticism. Identifying imprecations is closely related to the form critical approach. In this research, the following questions will be considered in terms of the form critical approach: how should we begin to approach the imprecations? Is the Imprecatory Psalm a *genre* like Lament Psalm or Praise Psalm? Or should we understand imprecations in the psalms as one of many themes in the Bible? In the next chapter this research will investigate the term imprecation to see if it is a *genre*, a sub-*genre*, or a theme.

2.2.5 Imprecation as poetical hyperbole

The Imprecatory Psalms have been interpreted as poetical hyperbole. Because psalms are poetry, not prose, likewise Imprecatory Psalms should be considered and treated as poetry. What makes poetry different from prose is that the former is replete with images and metaphors while the latter is not (Longman 1988:89-94). John Barton Payne says that the imprecatory prayer can be

easily justified if it is understood as poetry (Payne 1962:202). Because the psalms as poetry can be hyperbolic, the psalmists express themselves poetically and hyperbolically (DeWitt 1891:xi). Thus, the imprecations could be a means of communication.

Scholars get this idea of poetic exaggeration from the literature of the Babylonians and the Assyrians (McKenzie 1994:83). The so-called magical texts or Incantations of Babylonian and Assyrian literature have parallel passages that remind us of the Imprecatory Psalms in the Old Testament (Rogers 1908:151-152). Like Psalms, the Babylonian and Assyrian texts have superscriptions that say, "Incantation. O fire god, first born of Anu" and a verse in it sounds like one of the imprecatory prayers in the Old Testament, "Before thee have I placed them and give them into thy charge. Let them die, but let me live, let them be under a ban, but let me prosper, let them perish, but let me increase, let them become weak, but let me wax strong" (Rogers 1908:151).

The scholars of this position argue that Imprecatory Psalms of the Old Testament have similar formulae as in the Babylonian and Assyrian literature, they are "no more than a general expression of hostility" (McKenzie 1994:84). In other words, the Imprecatory Psalms are "mere formulae" that "do not mean what they say" (McKenzie 1994:84). Nevertheless, this imprecation as hyperbolic exaggeration cannot be held as a valid position because the hyperboles in the psalms are not a message that the psalmist seeks to communicate, but a means by which he imprecates his enemies. As Bullock correctly notes, anger wishing "others harm, shame, and even death" can be expressed by means of poetic hyperbole (Bullock 2001:229). Thus, this solution is not satisfactory. This research will seek to prove that Imprecatory Psalms can be a means of communicating the psalmist's anger even hyperbolically or exaggeratedly.

2.2.6 Imprecation against a national enemy, not a personal enemy

It has also been suggested that the imprecations are directed against those who were the psalmist's national enemies but not against personal enemies. Making the imprecation on national level rather than personal allows the psalmist to avoid "personal hatred" against his enemies (Bullock 2001:231). The reason for the national perspective rather than the personal is

that the psalmist speaks on behalf of the kingdom of God. Because the kingdom of Israel was a theocratic kingdom, the problems the psalmist encounters are "merged in those of the kingdom of God" (Briggs & Briggs 1906:xcix). Briggs and Briggs explain,

> The imprecations of the OT are connected with the sense of the solidarity of the interests of the individual servant of God with those of the nation of Israel, and with the religion of God itself; so that all personal and national considerations are merged in those of the kingdom of God (…). Whenever and wherever this sense of solidarity of interests has existed, or still exists, these imprecations express the religious feelings of God's people toward the enemies of God" (Briggs & Briggs 1906:xcix-c).[38]

This interpretation seems to be correct at first glance because there are many psalms which apparently reflect a national character, like Psalms 44, 46, 76, 78 and 82.[39] For example, Psalm 44 begins, "We have heard with our ears, O God, our fathers have told us the work You did in their days, in the days of old" (v 1b). In this psalm, the psalmist prays to God on behalf of Israel for His help. Likewise, Psalm 46 says, "God is our Refuge and Help!" (v. 1).

Even though it appears to be correct, this argument cannot be valid because there are many psalms of personal character only.[40] For example, Psalm 3, an individul lament of David (לדוד מזמור), describes the time David fled from his son Absalom. Therefore, this interpretation cannot be taken as satisfactory.

2.2.7 Imprecation as zeal

It has also been suggested that the psalmist's zeal for God's righteousness is the clue to the difficult nature of the imprecations. That is, they should be understood from God's perspective, not from men's. W.O.E. Oesterley says, "The truth of the righteousness of God was, of course,

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[38] Briggs and Briggs explain why personal can also be national in his commentary, "It is the modern discrimination between the religion of the individual and that of the nation, and between both of these and the ideal religion of mankind that makes these imprecations impossible to the experience of many moderns. These discriminations certainly belong to a later stage in the development of religion than the indiscriminating sense of solidarity. But individualism, however important, whether we think of the person or the denomination or the nation, ought not to impair the higher interests of the organism of the kingdom God, as the embodiment of the divine religion of mankind. It is indeed excessive individualism with its lack of appreciation of organic religion, that sees no place for imprecations against the enemies of the kingdom of God." (Briggs & Briggs 1906:c).

[39] The Corporate Pss are 12, 44, 60, 74, 79, 80, 83, 85, 90, 94, 123, 126, 129.

[40] The Individual Pss are 3, 4, 5, 7, 9-10, 13, 14, 17, 22, 25, 26, 27, 28, 31, 36, 39, 40:12-17, 41, 42-43, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 59, 61, 64, 69, 70, 71, 77, 86, 89, 120, 139, 141, 142.

axiomatic, but though the psalmist took it for granted, their devout belief in Him was such that they were impelled to reiterate it again and again, and to point to the manifold directions in which it was exercised" (Oesterley 1937:223). It needs to be pointed out that "zeal for God's righteousness" in the Psalms is none other than "prophetic influence", which was also "one of the great themes" in the prophetic literature (Oesterley 1937:223). This theme from the prophetic writings is continued and developed by the psalmists "through their own religious consciousness" (Oesterley 1937:223-224).

Agreeing with Oesterley, Erich Zenger calls the Imprecatory Psalms "psalms of zeal" (Zenger 1996:76). This psalms of zeal, also called "the psalms of vengeance" refer to any imprecations that have been made against the psalmist is "really against God" (Zenger 1996:76). Thus according to Zenger, the psalms indicate that the enemies should be punished according to what they have wrongfully done to him and according to God's righteous judgment (Zenger 1996:76). This idea of theodicy or "the justification of the dealings of God with man" is also found in Chalmers Martin's monograph, saying, "the imprecations are the expression of the longing of an Old Testament saint for the vindication of God's righteousness" (Martin 1972:121).[41] Agreeing with these scholars, R. K. Harrison says that the Imprecatory Prayers can be understood only in the context of the zeal for the God of Israel, who executes judgment on those who are wicked (Harrison 1969:1000).

The idea of retribution by means of judgment or imprecations[42] is necessary, because, according to Harrison, the psalmists had "no assurance of a future life," so retribution for wickedness needs to be "entertained in terms of the contemporary or immediate future situation"[43] (Harrison

[41] As Martin explains well, the idea of theodicy permeates the Psalms and the Old Testament as well, "How much this subject of theodicy, or the justification of the dealings of God with man, engaged the attention of the Old Testament writers is well known. The whole book of Job us devoted to it; it recurs often in the Pr and Ec; it appears again and again in the Pss. In Pss 5, 7, 10 and 17 it comes prominently to view, while Pss 37, 39, 49 and 73 are wholly given to the discussion of it" (Martin 1972:121).

[42] As Brueggemann explains, the idea of this retribution theodicy (in contrast to rewards for the righteous) is epitomized in Ps 1, "For the Lord knows the way of the righteous but the way of the wicked will perish" (v. 6) (Brueggemann 2002:174). Likewise, Osnat Singer explains, "the righteous and the wicked are two diametrically opposed poles in every possible respect" (Singer 2004:44)

[43] Harrison argues that the themes of retribution and imprecation are characteristics of God's righteous government (Pss 89:14, 97:2) and beside these characteristics, there are principles of justice, fidelity and mercy and "these qualities were directed supremely towards His covenant people Israel" (Harrison 1969:1000).

1969:1000). The psalmists have a zeal for God's righteousness by observing and keeping God's law such that if the Law is not kept, punishment is to be expected immediately (Lehman 1971:439).

Likewise, if the law is faithfully kept, rewards can be expected. The rewards are a prolonged and peaceful life (Dt 30:20, Ps 21:4, Pr 3:2), which is sharply contrasted with the punishment – disease and death.[44] Even after the Exodus, the Israelites certainly experienced how dangerous it was to fail to worship God because of their wickedness. Therefore, the psalmists' zeal for God's righteousness was "secured by a system of temporal rewards and punishments" (Hammond 1876:112). In other words, according to this school, Israel's belief in rewards and punishment is not so much future and general as temporal and specific.

At first glance, this school's interpretation seems to provide a satisfactory answer to the difficult nature of the imprecatory prayers because the Bible speaks of retribution assuming blessing and curses. However, it needs to be mentioned that biblical texts also show many instances where retribution does not seem to work.[45] An instance can be found in the book of Job. Job's friends thought that Job suffered because he did something wrong and cursed him of his evil deeds, even though they did not even know whether or not Job had done anything wrong (Walton 2008:346). Job's friends' retribution principle[46] that Job must repent of his sins cannot explain the suffering

[44] This idea of a contrast between the righteous and the wicked is explained by Brueggemann as follows, "the world is ordered by God so that everyone receives a fair outcome of reward or punishment commensurate with his or her conduct. God is the guarantor of a moral calculus inherent in the world, so that 'good people' (the obedient) prosper and 'bad people' (the disobedient) suffer" (Brueggemann 2002:174).

[45] The retribution principle in the Bible is a very complicated subject because the texts indeed indicate more than a retribution principle – the righteous prosper and wicked suffer. The problem is that the Bible does not speak clearly about it. It is true that the retribution principle is expressed in the deuteronomistic notion of blessings and curses. However, this lack of clarity permeates the Bible – Job, Chr, Pss, Mi (especially 5:15).

[46] However, Job's three friends gradually changed their mind on Job's suffering and slowly and reluctantly began to accept that Job might not have sinned. Oesterley says, "The classical example of this gradual change of mind is, of course, the book of Job. The writer of this book makes Job's three friends the representatives of the traditional belief; as Job was a great sufferer both in body and in temporal affairs, he must be a sinner. In vain does Job protest that he has not sinned; his friends continue in stubborn argument their effort to convince Job of his sinfulness, and to urge him to confess it. But Job persists in protesting his innocence, and brings forward various pleas. Ultimately he has a glimpse of the solution of the problem: God himself will vindicate His servant. This, together with his vision of God (Job 42:5, 'But now mine eye seeth thee'), gives him a new conception of the Almighty, the first step towards belief in a future life, when what appear to be the inconsistencies and contradictions of this world will be rectified" (Oesterley 1937:239-240).

of Job because his suffering is "not restricted by a theological system of retribution"[47] (Waters 1997:10). Another instance is found in the reign of king Manasseh in the book of Chronicles. The Chronicler is not clear about how the most wicked king, Manasseh ("who is ultimately responsible for the destruction of the Temple in 586") reigned for fifty-five years (Berlin, Brettler & Fishbane 2004:1278). Another instance is found in Jeremiah. The prophet Jeremiah questioned the justice of God, "Righteous are you, YHWH, when I plead my case before You. Indeed I would speak with you about justice. Why do the way of the wicked prosper? Why do the way of the wicked prosper? Why are all the treacherous at ease?" (12:1). Likewise, the prophet Ezekiel questioned, "Yet you say, 'the way of the LORD is not just.' Hear, O house of Israel, Is my way unjust? Is it not your ways that are unjust?" (18:25). "Yet the house of Israel says, 'the way of the LORD is not just.' Are my ways unjust?, O house of Israel, Is it not your ways that are unjust?" (v. 29). In a nutshell, the Bible goes beyond retribution to the point that the retribution principle does not seem to work (especially in the case of Job's suffering). For this reason, this school's interpretation of imprecation should be rejected.

2.2.8 Imprecation as moral indignations or emotions

The imprecations have also been interpreted as moral indignations or emotions wrongly expressed by the psalmist. Mickelsen suggested that the imprecations should be regarded as "the poetic expressions of individuals" who were mad at evil, "yet who attitude towards retribution" which is "so colored by their sense of being wronged or of the blasphemy committed that they speak out in language" (Mickelsen 1963:333). Mickelsen is convinced that the Imprecatory Prayers in Psalms 109 and 137 go against the whole teaching of the Bible (Mickelsen 1963:333).[48] He refers to some biblical passages as his supporting evidence. Leviticus 19:18

[47] For more information on how Job's three friends' traditional retribution principle cannot stand, see (Waters 1997:436-451).

[48] According to Mickelsen, the Imprecatory Prayers in the Pss are very far from the Bible's teaching that one should "leave judgment to God" and from Jesus' teaching that one should love even his or her enemies. He continues, "Of course, no Old Testament poet knew the teachings of Jesus! But the revelation of God in the Old Testament did speak about vengeance." Moreover, he explains how the Old Testament passages are quoted by the New Testament writers in the passages such as Rm 12:19 and Heb 10:30. Rm 12:19 says, "Do not take revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, 'vengeance is mine, I will repay,' says the Lord." Likewise, Heb 10:30 says, "For we know Him who said, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay,' and again, 'the Lord will judge His people.'" He suggests "the right attitude" the believers should have towards their enemies referring to Pr 24:17 and 25:21. (Mickelsen 1963:333).

prohibits from taking vengeance, "You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am YHWH." Deuteronomy 32:35 reads that vengeance belongs to God, "Vengeance is mine, and recompense!" Mickelsen explains, "the intensity of the poet's feelings" is "certainly the product of his experiences" (Mickelsen 1963:333). Because the abovementioned passages prohibit imprecations, Mickelsen cannot help but regard imprecations as moral emotions wrongly expressed by the psalmist. C. S. Lewis, a British Christian apologist, agrees with Mickelsen and comments on the psalmist's imprecations saying, "The reaction of the Psalmists to injury, though profoundly natural, is profoundly wrong"[49] (Lewis 1958:26). Lewis argues so because of the psalmist's "fatal confusion between being in the right and being righteous" (Lewis 1958:18).

Lewis continues his argument saying that the "vindictive hatred" in biblical texts should not be considered "good and pious" only because it is in the Bible (Lewis 1958:22). He comments, "The hatred is there – festering, gloating, undisguised – and also we should be wicked if we in any way condoned or approved it, or (worse still) used it to justify similar passions in ourselves" (Lewis 1958:22). Lewis' argument is that any portion of Scripture that seems contradictory to itself should not be considered as part of the Bible, the Word of God.

However, this moral indignation or emotional approach cannot be maintained because once this approach is taken, the issue of canon and compilation arises. This approach cannot explain the *raison d'etre* of the imprecations in the canon of the Psalms, which is regarded as "the book of worship for God's people" (Day 2002:26). Likewise, George S. Gunn argues against this group of scholars saying,

> To regard them as wholly vindictive may be a sufficient explanation for the *writing* of them, because anyone in certain given circumstances of distress and provocation may have surrendered to this dark spirit. What we have to account for, however, is not the writing of them but their incorporation into the *Psalter* at the time when it was compiled.

[49] Lewis argues against those scholars who "try to excuse it on the ground that they were not Christians and knew no better" with two reasons as follows, "The first is that in Judaism itself the corrective to this natural reaction already existed. "Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart…", say Lv 19:17-18. The second reason is more disquieting. If we are to excuse the poets of the Pss on the ground that they were not Christians, we ought to be able to point to the same sort of thing, and worse, in Pagan authors. I can find in them (Pagan literature) lasciviousness, much brutal insensibility, cold cruelties taken for granted but not this fury or luxury of hatred. One's first impression is that the Jews were much more vindictive and vitriolic than the Pagans" (Lewis 1958:27-28).

> It is as nearly certain as can be that there was a higher reason for their inclusion in a collection that was intended solely for use in the worship of God." (Gunn 1956:99).

Gunn argues that there must be a reason for the imprecatory passages that appear to be contradictory to the Bible, just like there is a reason for the psalm as a whole – for worshipping God. In other words, the Imprecatory Psalms are as important as the whole book of Psalms. Agreeing with Gunn and strengthening his argument, L. Russ Bush argues that the Imprecatory Prayers do not speak against the whole teaching of the Bible, but serve as "internal evidence that the biblical writers themselves did not see any inconsistency in their devotion to God and their call for judgment upon the wicked" (Bush 1990:6). Likewise, Day regards the Imprecatory Prayers as an "integral part of the canonical *Psalter*" (Day 2002:19). Another reason that this argument cannot be valid is, as Eric Peels explains, because of the psalmist's relation with God. Peels understands that the Imprecation not so much expresses the psalmist's emotion against his enemies as it does "his choice to take a stand" and his attitude toward his enemies, who are also God's enemies as well (Peels 2008:46). Peels correctly explains, "By hating God's enemies the poet relates to God's own hatred of the wicked and his curse on them" (Peels 2008:35).

Just as the scholars mentioned above argued, the main flaw of this approach to imprecation as moral indignation or emotion is that their biblical passages cited as support do not support their argument, but rather weakens it. Therefore, this approach could be rejected as an unsatisfactory solution.

2.2.9 Imprecation as the words of spiritual enemies

Another suggested solution is that in order to properly interpret the imprecations in Psalms, they should be understood in a spiritual or figurative sense (Putnam 1980:19; Vos 1942:126). The enemies against whom David prayed were not historical or personal enemies, but "spiritual enemies" representing "demonic powers" (Vos 1942:126). Johannes G. Vos tries to understand the imprecations in a slightly different way. He rather understands David's enemies as human beings "under the influence of demonic powers" (Vos 1942:127), as David imprecates his enemies in Psalm 109:6 saying, "Appoint a wicked man over him; let an accuser (שטן) stand at his right hand." And the imprecation continues, "Let his days be few; let another take his office.

Let his children be orphans, and his wife a widow" (vv. 8-9). Interestingly, part of this imprecation of Psalm 109 is quoted in Acts 1:20 ("let another take his office"), in the narrative of replacing Judas Iscariot's office with Matthias. This imprecation thus became a prophecy fulfilled in Judas Iscariot (Vos 1942:127). Likewise Joseph Hammond suggests that the enemies of David should be understood as "spiritual enemies" (Hammond 1876:35).

At first glance this interpretation of spiritualization seems correct and commendable because of its attempt to connect the imprecations with Christ and His followers' spiritual warfare. But it should not be held as a valid argument, because even though the separation between human and spiritual enemies seems to solve the problem, the Old Testament still indicates that the enemies of David are human enemies, not spiritual or demonic as we have seen in the case of Judas Iscariot. Moreover, another reason this interpretation cannot be accepted is that it overlooks the significance of the historical context or situation in which psalmists experienced agony. Therefore, this interpretation is not satisfactory.

2.2.10 The distinction between the sin and the sinner

Another suggested solution to the issue of imprecation in the Psalms is the attempt to make a distinction between sin and sinners (Bullock 2001:232; McKenzie 1994:90). Based on the biblical moralists' argument that divides between *odium abominationis* and *odium inimicitiae*, McKenzie develops the idea of a distinction between the sin and the sinner.[50] The *odium inimicitiae* aims at the person himself "regardless of good or evil" while the *odium abominationis* is concentrated on "some evil quality of the person" (McKenzie 1994:90). In modern English terms, these two terms can be expressed as the sin and the sinner respectively. McKenzie explains that if the evil quality of a person is genuine, any hatred directed against the person is "altogether free from sin" (McKenzie 1994:90). For clarification, McKenzie provides the following example,

[50] Unfortunately, the works that McKenzie refers to are not available in published forms either online or offline. However, the terms (*odium abominationis* and *odium inimicitiae*) are from Noldin-Schmitt, Summa Theologiae Moralis (1937), II, 104; Merkelbach, Summa Theologiae Moralis (1938), I, 720 f; Genicot-Salsmans, Institutiones Theologiae Moralis (1939), I, 176 f. (McKenzie 1994:90, footnote 12).

> Thus law-abiding citizens consent to the execution of a murderer not because of the pleasure his killing gives them, but because his death restores the order of justice which his crime has violated. So, as American citizens, we rejoice at the victories of our armed forces; not because of our glee at blood-letting, but because by these victories our nation is defended against its enemies (McKenzie 1994:90).

With his distinction between sin and sinner, McKenzie argues that hatred or curses against enemies can be justifiable[51] with some limits. Those limits are:

> 1) Hatred must not be directed at the person of one's neighbor; he is hated for his evil quality. 2) One may desire that the divine justice be accomplished in the sinner; but it must be a desire for divine justice, not a desire for the personal evil of another out of personal revenge. 3) The infliction of evil may not be desired absolutely, but only under the condition that the sinner remains obdurate and unrepentant. 4) It must be accompanied by that true supernatural charity which efficaciously desires the supreme good – the eternal happiness – of all men in general, not excluding any individual who is capable of attaining it (McKenzie 1994:93).

This idea of making distinction between the sin and the sinner seems to justify the psalmists' curses against their enemies because the hatred is not directed against the enemies, but against their "hateful quality: sin" (McKenzie 1994:90). However, if this view is taken, a problem arises. Bullock is correct when he says, "it is so difficult to separate one's hatred for sin from hatred for the sinner" (Bullock 2001:232). McKenzie's demarcation between the sinner's nature and guilt, that is, the sin and the sinner, is indeed commendable. However, as Bullock correctly noted, it does not seem to be very easy to make a distinction between the sin and the sinner, and between the sinner's nature and guilt (Bullock 2001:232). For this reason, this theory is not convincing.

[51] McKenzie's distinction between sin and sinner is based on St. Thomas Aquinas' view on "hatred of one's neighbor" from whose work McKenzie quotes in order to support his argument, "Hatred is opposed to love . . . so that hatred of a thing is evil according as the love of that thing is good. Now love is due to our neighbor in respect of what he holds from God, i.e. in respect of nature and grace, but not in respect of what he has of himself and from the devil, i.e. in respect of sin and lack of justice. Consequently it is lawful to hate the sin in one's brother, and whatever pertains to the defect of divine justice, but we cannot hate our brother's nature and grace without sin. Now it is part of our love for our brother that we hate the fault and the lack of good in him, since desire for another's good is equivalent to hatred of his evil. Consequently the hatred of one's brother, if we consider it simply, is always sinful" (McKenzie 1994:92). He continues to quote, "God hates the sin which is in the detractor, not his nature: so that we can hate detractors without committing a sin. Men are not opposed to us in respect of the goods which they have received from God: wherefore, in this respect, we should love them. But they are opposed to us, in so far as they show hostility towards us, and this is sinful in them. In this respect we should hate them, for we should hate in them the fact that they are hostile to us" (McKenzie 1994:92).

2.2.11 Imprecation as quotations of the psalmist's enemies

In order to remove the contradiction of the imprecations, it has been suggested that the imprecations in the psalms are not the words of the psalmists but quotations of the psalmist's enemies (Bullock 2001:231; Hammond 1876: 28; McKenzie 1994: 86). The scriptural references that are used for this argument are Psalms 22:7-9, 41:7-9 and 109:2-5, 6-19, 20-31. Psalm 22:7-9 is the first example. As the first verse (superscription) indicates, the passage is 'of David.' In it, David prays to God how he has been mistreated with the words of his enemies as in verse 8 "He commits himself to YHWH; let Him deliver him; let Him rescue him, for he delights in Him." This quotation of others is also found in Psalm 41, another Psalm of David, "A wicked thing is poured out on him; he will not rise again where he lies" (v. 8). As these passages show, there are a few scholars who hold this interpretation (Hammond 1876:28; Boylan 1921:220-21). In exegeting an imprecatory passage of Psalm 108, Patrick Boylan explains, "It is difficult to imagine the words contained in verses 16-19 as said, even in the imprecation, of the psalmist. The utterance of the words in verses 6-19 against the psalmist is the opus, the conduct, of the psalmist's foes" (Boylan 1921:220-21). Interestingly, Heinrich Herkenne understands verses 6-19 of an imprecatory passage of Psalm 109 as the words of God, that is, the answer to the prayer of the psalmist against his enemies (Herkenne 1936:358-360).[52] Despite the slight difference, Herkenne agrees with the above-mentioned scholars that the imprecations are the words of others.

This interpretation is commendable, because as Bullock asserts, it seeks to protect "the theological integrity of the psalms" (Bullock 2001:231). However, it cannot be held as a satisfactory solution for at least two reasons. First, this interpretation ignores "the historical reality"[53] of the Imprecatory Psalms. Second, there are few Imprecatory Psalms that are quoted by the psalmist's enemies. Therefore, this interpretation tends not to be convincing.

[52] Herkenne discusses the imprecations found in this psalm with the following title, "Die Antwort Gottes: Ankündigung des Gerichts und des Strafurteils über den hauptschuldigen Gegner (God's answer: announcement of the court and sentence over the blamable opponents)" (Herkenne 1936:358-360).

[53] Bullock argues that this view is an "unrealistic" and "impractical" that "few scholars have espoused" (Bullock 2001:231).

2.3 Move beyond unsatisfactory solutions

This chapter has examined various interpretations with various methodologies to the problematic nature of the Imprecatory Psalms. We have seen that the interpretations discussed above are not satisfactory enough to solve the problems of the psalms. What can be known from the literature review of the Imprecatory Psalms is that each school of interpretation tries to approach the problem with one methodology (that tends to focus on one theme or on one concept) that eventually turns out to be unsatisfactory. As already discussed in the previous chapter, the methodology of this research is a canonical approach (which is holistic in nature)[54] which is to cope with any approach that utilizes only one methodology, and which encompasses many themes and sub-themes[55] in order to move beyond the above-mentioned possibilities in order to get a satisfactory solution.

[54] The Bible as canon is the "starting point" for those who interpret the Bible with a canonical approach because they "stand within religious communities that accept the Bible as a canon of Scripture" (Kaminsky, Lohr & Reasoner 2014:42). As the term "canon (a Greek word meaning "rule," "standard", "measuring stick") itself indicates, scholars of the canonical approach are greatly interested in how the Bible "as a whole and its various parts speak to faith communities" (Kaminsky, Lohr & Reasoner 2014:42).

[55] This approach deals with many themes because canonical scholars are interested in how "individual passages sit within particular biblical books as well as within a larger body of literature (whether within the Torah, the Hebrew Bible, or the larger Christian Bible)" (Kaminstky, Lohr & Reasoner 2014:42). Moreover, they are also interested in "why the canon contains the variety of books it does, how these books relate to each other, and whether there are unifying theological themes overall" (Kaminsky, Lohr & Reasoner 2014:42-43).

Chapter 3
PSALM 137 AS A DISCRETE UNIT

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter illustrates the various attempts to interpret the Imprecatory Prayer with various methods. However, these attempts turned out to be unsatisfactory in various ways because of their non-holistic methods. In order to provide the most satisfactory solution, this chapter examines, exegetes and interprets the Imprecatory Psalm with a canonical approach. A literary-historical study and structural analysis of the psalm will lay the foundation for the rest of the study – reading the psalm in the canonical context of the *Psalter* and the rest of the Old Testament. By analyzing the psalm, this chapter will draw out the key theological themes or motifs before pursuing a canonical reading of the psalm. Key themes of the psalm help the reader to see intertextual connections between the psalm and other Old Testament imprecations. In this way, this study will be able to show what other texts of imprecation suggest about the imprecation of Psalm 137.

3.2 Translation and textual-critical concern

3.2.1 Text and translation

1 עַל־נַהֲרוֹת | בָּבֶל שָׁם יָשַׁבְנוּ גַּם־בָּכִינוּ בְּזָכְרֵנוּ אֶת־צִיּוֹן׃
2 עַל־עֲרָבִים בְּתוֹכָהּ תָּלִינוּ כִּנֹּרוֹתֵינוּ׃
3 כִּי שָׁם שְׁאֵלוּנוּ שׁוֹבֵינוּ דִּבְרֵי־שִׁיר וְתוֹלָלֵינוּ שִׂמְחָה שִׁירוּ לָנוּ מִשִּׁיר צִיּוֹן׃
4 אֵיךְ נָשִׁיר אֶת־שִׁיר יְהוָה עַל אַדְמַת נֵכָר׃
5 אִם־אֶשְׁכָּחֵךְ יְרוּשָׁלִָם תִּשְׁכַּח יְמִינִי׃
6 תִּדְבַּק לְשׁוֹנִי | לְחִכִּי אִם־לֹא אֶזְכְּרֵכִי אִם־לֹא אַעֲלֶה אֶת־יְרוּשָׁלִַם עַל רֹאשׁ שִׂמְחָתִי׃
7 זְכֹר יְהוָה | לִבְנֵי אֱדוֹם אֵת יוֹם יְרוּשָׁלִַם הָאֹמְרִים עָרּוּ | עָרּוּ עַד הַיְסוֹד בָּהּ׃
8 בַּת־בָּבֶל הַשְּׁדוּדָה אַשְׁרֵי שֶׁיְּשַׁלֶּם־לָךְ אֶת־גְּמוּלֵךְ שֶׁגָּמַלְתְּ לָנוּ׃
9 אַשְׁרֵי | שֶׁיֹּאחֵז וְנִפֵּץ אֶת־עֹלָלַיִךְ אֶל־הַסָּלַע׃

1 [a] By the rivers in Babylon,[b] there we sat down[c] even[d] we wept, when we remembered Zion.
2 On the willows in the middle of it we hung our harps.
3 For[e] there our captors asked us for songs[56], and our tormenters[f] mirth, *saying*, "Sing us one of the songs[g] of Zion!"
4 How can[h] we sing the LORD's song in a foreign land?
5 If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand wither![i]
6 Let my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth, if I do not remember you, if I do not set Jerusalem above my highest joy!
7 Remember, O LORD, against the Edomites[57] the day of Jerusalem, who said, "Lay it bare, lay it bare down to its foundations!"
8 O Daughter of Babylon, doomed to be devastated,[j] blessed will be the one who repays you with the recompense with which you have done to us[k]!
9 Blessed will be the one who takes and dashes your little ones against the Rock!

3.2.2 Textual and translation notes

(a) The critical apparatus of the Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia (abbreviated BHS) reads, "the Septuagint (LXX) puts τῷ Δαυίδ" before "By the rivers of Babylon." As Briggs and Briggs correctly explain, the addition of "of David" does not mean that "it was composed by David but that it was of Davidic type" (Briggs & Briggs 1906:485). Besides this addition, the Lucianic LXX version adds "through Jeremiah (διὰ Ἰερεμίου)" before "for David" (Allen 2002:301; Goldingay 2008:599; Vesco 2006:1278). The reason for this addition is probably meant to compare the judgments coming against the Ammonites and Babylon in Jeremiah 49-50 (Allen 2002:301). The vengeful (שלם) and cursing (נפץ) words in the piel in verses 8 and 9 are also found in Jeremiah 51:20-24 (Allen 2002:301; Slomovic 1979:361-362). The added heading probably provides a clue for the reason for the imprecation in Psalm 137. This heading is quite helpful in understanding the hard nature of the imprecation. Delitzsch comments on this heading,

> The inscription τῷ Δαυίδ (διὰ) Ἰερεμίου found in codices of the LXX, which is meant to say that this is a Davidic song coming from the heart of Jeremiah, is all the more erroneous as Jeremiah never was one of the Babylonian exiles (Delitzsch 1949:331).

However, even without the addition "of David," it is not difficult to see that the pslamist and the exiled people in the psalm have the same pathos that David had due to difficult times with his enemies (as many Lament and/or Imprecatory Psalms of David indicate). Even without the

[56] Literally, words of song.
[57] Literally, the children of Edom.

addition of "through Jeremiah," it is expected that there would be a judgment against Babylon through the psalmist's imprecation. Therefore, this research follows the Masoretic text (MT).

(b) Some scholars read this word "בבבל" (in Babylon) instead of "בבל" (Babylon) because for metrical and stylistic reasons (Dahood 1970:269; Freedman 1971:190-191; Halle & McCarthy 1981:165; Renfroe 1988:516). The reason is that they believe the Qumran Psalms scroll (QPs) renders a more accurate reading than the MT (Freedman 1971:191; Sanders 1967:73). The reason is based on the following three arguments:

[be]Babel	(1a) By the rivers in Babylon
	(1b) there we sat down / loudly we wept
be-zokrenu	(1c) – when we remembered Zion –
… *betokah*	(2a) By the laurels in its midst
	(2b) we hung up our many-stringed lyres.

The first reason is that haplography ("the loss of something during copying") is more likely than dittography ("copy error repeating something accidentally") (Stuart 2009:178). In other words, in the copying process, it is more likely that the copyist had in mind "an original sequence of three successive *b(ב)*'s", not just of two successive of *b(ב)*'s, thus it is more likely to omit rather than to add (Freedman 1971:191). The second reason is parallelism. Because of 'al arabim *be*tokah in verse 2a, Babel with the preposition *be* (*be*Babel) seems more likely (Freedman 1971:191). The repetition of the phrase, אשרי ש ("Blessed is he who…") in verses 8 and 9 may complement and support the poetic repetition of *be*, that is, *be*Babel (v. 1a) along with *be*tokah (v. 2a) (Freedman 1971:191). The last reason is that because of the parallel pattern of 7-8 syllables in both verses 1 and 2, the reading should be *be*Babel rather than merely Babel (Dahood 1970:269; Freedman 1971:191). Despite these reasons, it is interesting to note that all modern English translations (ASV, CSB, ESV, JPS, NASB, NET, NIV and so on) follow the MT rather than the Qumran. Scholars who follow the MT (Kellermann 1978:45; Kraus 1993:501; Terrien 2003:864-866; Weiser 1962:793-795) do not explain why the MT is the superior reading over the Qumran. However, it appears that translating babel either as "beBabel" as if the Qumran text has the superior reading or following the MT and translating "of Babel" does not change any meaning in the pericope. Because of the above-mentioned reasons (especially the reasons of haplography and metrics/style), this study follows the Qumran reading.

(c) While most English versions translate the perfect conjugation of ישב as past tense[58] and the LXX as aorist, ἐκαθίσαμεν ("we sat down"), German scholar, Diethelm Michel translates it as present tense, "das sitzen wir" (Michel 1960:83). The reason why Michel translates it as present tense is because the imprecatory prayers in this psalm clearly indicate that the psalmist is still in the exile and the exile has not yet been finished (Michel 1960:83). Leslie C. Allen does not agree with Michel and argues that this translating issue is closely related to "the larger question of reconstructing the setting of the psalm as a whole" (Allen 2002:302). Allen argues that the perfect verbs of verses 1-3 should be translated as past tense because this psalm describes the event of "Yahweh's victory over foreign enemies at Jerusalem, which typically uses the topographical adverb 'there', here transformed into a bitter report involving the loss of Jerusalem" (Allen 2002:303). Because this psalm is closely interwoven by various themes, mainly the theme of God's victory/punishment over/of the enemies, reported by the psalmist, this study translates the perfect verbs of verses 1-3 as past tense. This psalm clearly shows that the psalmist seeks out God's judgment against his enemies through his imprecatory prayers (vv. 7-9). This study follows the translation of the English versions and the LXX.

(d) The English versions are roughly divided into translating the particle *gam* either as "and" denoting "addition"[59] (ESV, NASB, NET, RSV, TNK) or as "yea" introducing "a climax, *yea*, esp. in a rhetorical style[60] (ASV, KJV, NKJV). The LXX renders the translation as "and (καί)". Interestingly, Ugariticists heavily influenced by Cyrus Gordon like Dahood and Freedman translate the Hebrew word *gam* as "loudly" because of the cognate study they have done showing that the Hebrew particle gam contains the Ugaritic word "*g* (= voice)" and the adverbial "*m*" meaning "loudly" (Dahood 1968:15; Dahood 1970:269; Freedman 1971:191). According to Gordon, the meaning of *gam* as "loudly" has been weakened to the meaning of "also" or "even" indicating "addition" (Gordon 1965:378:§547). C. J. Labuschagne asserts that the original meaning of "loudly" does not seem to be "preserved" in Biblical Hebrew while it is preserved in Ugaritic (Labuschagne 1967:195). Labuschagne's argument can be supported by one fairly recent Hebrew reference grammar, Williams' Hebrew Syntax, in which the Ugaritic influences on *gam* is not even found in the list of various functions of *gam* (Williams 2007:138-139, §378-

[58] Among the English translation versions, NET translates it as present tense, "We sit and weep."
[59] Brown, Driver and Briggs, "*gam*" (2001:169).
[60] Brown, Driver and Briggs, "*gam*" (2001:169).

382). Out of five functions of *gam*,[61] the first three options seem possible: addition, emphatic (or assertive), and rhetorical.

However, this study translates the particle as "even" because from the context, *gam* seems to function emphatically and rhetorically beyond simply the meaning, "addition." Moreover, we have seen Labuschagne's argument that the Hebrew word *gam* itself functions as "an emphasizing particle" just like the Ugaritic word, "*gm*". In other words, without referring to the Ugaritic word, translating the particle as "even" is possible.

(e) Many English versions and the LXX translate כי as "for (ὅτι)" because of its "causal" function among various options.[62] This particle introduces the reason for weeping in verse 1 (Allen 2002:302). However, Kraus, Hossfeld and Zenger emphatically translate it as "yes" without any syntactical explanation (Kraus 1993:500; Hossfeld & Zenger 2005:512). It could possibly be translated emphatically, but in order to know the reason for weeping, it should be translated causally. Therefore, this study follows the English translations and the LXX, and translates it as "for."

(f) This word, a *hapax legomenon*[63] is hard to translate as some scholars note. The LXX and the Syriac version of the OT read "those who led us away"[64] and suggest that it probably has a Hebrew equivalent of ומוליכינו ("and our oppressors"), but we cannot be certain and the Symmachus' Greek translation of the OT reads, καὶ οἱ καταλαζονευόμενοι ἡμῶν. The vulgate reads "*et qui adfligebant nos* (and those who mistreat us)", and the Targum reads "*wbzwbn'* (and

[61] They are "*gam* for addition (also, both … and also), emphatic *gam* (even, just), rhetorical *gam* (yes, even), correlative *gam* (on one's part), and concessive *gam* (although, even though)" (Williams 2007:138-139, §378-382).
[62] For more syntactical functions of the particle, כי, see "Williams Hebrew Syntax" (Williams 2007:156-159, §444-452).
[63] Anderson asserts, "its originality is dubious" (Anderson 1972:898); Allen asserts, it is "problematic" (Allen 2002:302); Dahood maintains that it is "one of the most recalcitrant hapax legomena of the *Psalter*" (Dahood 1970:270); Likewise Duhm asserts, "Es ist ein ganz unbekanntes und unerklärbares Wort" ("It is a completely unknown and inexplicable word") (Duhm 1899:283); Goldingay says it is "puzzling" (Goldingay 2008:599).
[64] The Greek word ἀπάγω is used in the New Testament indicating either leading someone away (see Lk 13:15), bringing someone before someone else (Mt 26:57; Mk 14:53; Ac 23:17), or leading someone away to trial, prison, or execution (Mk 14:44; Lk 23:26; Ac 12:19).

our plunderers)", possibly "ושללינו (and our plunderers)."[65] The Masoretic text's reading, ותוללינו, probably originated from the word, ילל (to howl, wail); however, this is not certain.

Some old English versions translate this word "They that wasted us" (ASV, KJV). Following Symmachus' Greek version, a few English versions (NET) and commentators translate this word as "our mockers" (Allen 2002:301-302; Goldingay 2008:599; Vesco 2006:1277). Among these commentators, Allen and Freedman compare the word תולל ("tormentor") with התל ("to mock, deceive") and translate it as "mocker" (Allen 2002:302; Freedman 1971:192). The majority of English Bibles (ESV, HCSB, NASB, NIV, NRSV, RSV) and commentators follow the MT and translate it as "our tormentors" (DeClaissé-Walford 2014:954; Delitzsch 1949:333; Futato 2009:407; VanGemeren 1991: 827-828; VanGemeren 2005:950).

With his comparative study of the Ugaritic word *hlm* ("to strike"), Dahood suggests that the word *twll* can be understood as *hll* with the participial prefix *t* in the poel, meaning "to make (someone) a fool" or "to make a mockery of" having observed such passages as Psalm 102:9 (*m'holalay*: "my mocker" or "those who mock me") and 139:21(*t^{e}qōm^{e}mekā*, "your challengers" or "those who rise up against you" with the disappearance of *h*) (Dahood 1970:271). Kraus, who translates it as "our oppressors" (Kraus 1993:500), suggests *yll* ("lament") is the possible reading because he believes that "this has to do with the mistreatment and punishment of the captives" (Kraus 1993:501).

Because no conclusion is made among scholars concerning which reading is the most probable, (Allen 2002:302; Dahood 1970:270-271; Hossfeld & Zenger 2005:5122) and because it would not be necessary to discuss it in detail, this study follows the MT. Because "our tormentors" or "our mockers" are not significantly different, this study accepts the MT's reading. Therefore, suffice it to say that translating *t-w-l-l* as "tormenters" would be satisfactory enough for this study.

[65] NKJV reads "those who plundered us."

(g) It should be translated as plural "songs" because the word is a collective[66] especially with the preposition מן.[67] It is interesting to note that Freedman translates it as "song-book, hymnal" (Freedman 1971:193).

(h) The function of this imperfect verb is modal; it should be translated with an auxiliary verb like can (NASB, NIV, NET, NLT)/could (NRSV), shall (KJV, RSV, ESV)/should, etc. (van der Merwe, Naude & Kroeze 2002:148). Thus, this study follows many English Bible versions and translates this verb modally as "How can we sing!"

(i) According to the apparatus, the LXX reads ἐπιλησθείη (optative aorist passive), "to be forgotten," which is equivalent to תשכח (niphal of שכח). The Syriac and Targum versions of the OT add the 1sg suffix to כחש. It has been proposed that תכחש "it will wither" (Qal imperfect) or תכחש "it will cause to wither" (Piel imperfect) should be read instead of תשכח "it will forget".

English versions translate it either as "forget her (or "its") skill" (ASV, ESV, NASB, NKJV) or as "withers" (RSV, TNK), or "is forgotten" (LXX) depending on the various text-critical readings. The English versions that follow the MT (RSV, TNK) translate it as "wither" with an added word, "skill." As VanGemeren correctly maintains, it is not a case of haplography (omission of the word, "skill") because "there is no evidence to support this proposal" (VanGemeren 2005:951).

It appears that the LXX translators sought to solve the problem of the missing direct object by making it into a passive verb, "ἐπιλησθείη (optative aorist passive)." Thus, the English version of the LXX reads, "May my right hand be forgotten!" However, as Eitan well criticized, this option cannot stand because of the "bad parallelism" with the following verse, "Let my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth, if I do not remember you" (Eitan 1928:194). If the translation of the LXX is taken, the verb "to be forgotten" is the only passive voice in the parallelism. Besides, the chiastic structure of verses 5-6 does not seem to support the LXX's passive voice:

[66] "A singular word may refer to a group of people (e.g., עם 'people') or a group of things (e.g., בקר, 'cattle') (Williams 2007:1, §2).
[67] This is called "partitive *min* (some of, of)", whereby "the object of the preposition *min* can be the whole from which a part is taken." (Williams 2007:123-124, §324).

A If I forget you, O Jerusalem,
B Let my right hand wither!
B' Let my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth,
A' If I do not remember you, (McCann 1996:1227).

For this reason, the LXX's reading should be rejected. Moreover, as Eitan notes, the parallelism of this chiasm requires "a verb expressing loss of the faculty of motion" (Eitan 1928:194-195). Just as the tongue loses its "faculty of motion", so does the right hand. Thus, the verb "to forget" should be read and translated as "to wither." Kraus argues that this is "scribal error" and that the verb should instead be read, "wither away (תשכח)" (Kraus 1993:501). This has been understood as a case of metathesis of שכח (to forget) with the verb כשח (to grow lean, wither) by comparing the Hebrew verb כחש with the Arabic verb, *kasiḥa*, "be crippled, weak-handed" (Allen 2002:302). It has also been attempted to compare the verb שכח (to forget) with the Ugaritic verb, *ṯkḥ*, meaning "to shine (of heavenly bodies)" or "to be passionate" (Gordon 1965: 502, §19:2673; Allen 2002:302).

Except for the LXX's reading "be forgotten", any reading – either "wither" or "forget (its skill)" – can be taken because scholars do not make any decision on this reading/translating issue. However, Eitan's explanation of "loss of the faculty of motion" is strong and persuasive enough to suggest translating it as "wither."

(j) Symmachus' Greek translation of the OT reads λῃστρίς which means "robber" or "thief", and perhaps it (passive participle) should be read as השודדה (Qal, active participle, feminine, singular). Commentators and Bible translators differ in rendering these readings. Many English Bible translators (CJB, NASB, ESV, HCSB, NET, NKJV, NLT) and commentators – Delitzsch (1949:336), Goldingay (2008:600) McCann (1996:1226), VanGemeren (2005:92), Futato (2009:408) and DeClaissé-Walford (2014:954) – follow the MT and translate it as a passive participle – "devastated one" or "doomed to be devastated." Among these scholars, Delitzsch sees the word, השדודה of MT as more plausible because the context of Psalm 137 clearly shows that Babylon is not described as a devastator but as the one who will be devastated according to the psalmist's "cry for vengeance" (Delitzsch 1949:336). Agreeing with Delitzsch, VanGemeren sees this word, השדודה, with the theme of "divine retribution", meaning that Babylon will be

punished and devastated by God for "the terrible wrong the Babylonians had done" to God's people (VanGemeren 2005:953). Like Delitzsch, VanGemeren understands that the way Babylon is described is Babylon, the one who will be devastated, not Babylon the devastator. Babylon will be put into "a state of desolation and defenselessness that they are unable to defend even their infants" (VanGemeren 2005:953).

However, another group of scholars (Allen 2002:302; Briggs & Briggs 1906:486; Dahood 1970:273; Kraus 1993:501) and some English Bibles (AMP, CEB) follow Symmachus' version and translate it as an active participle. Among these scholars, Briggs and Briggs see Babylon as "chiefly responsible for the destruction of the city" (Briggs & Briggs 1906:486). Likewise, Kraus argues that the exilic context in which it is Babylon who carried Judah into captivity and afflicted them makes the reading active– the destroyer (Kraus 1993:501).

This study follows the MT's reading/translation because Babylon in this psalm is rather described as the one who will be destroyed than the one who destroyed – to the point that their infants will be destroyed.

(k) According to Apparatus, this phrase "with the recompense with which you have done to us" should be deleted as a gloss. Gunkel rejects this as superfluous, believing that this phrase had been inserted (Gunkel 1968:582). Likewise Kraus rejects this phrase as an "interpolation that overloads the verse" (Kraus 1993:501). Kellermann rejects this phrase as an insertion because he believes that verse 8a has been influenced by Jeremiah 50:29 (Kellermann 1978:46), saying, "Summon archers against Babylon, all those who bend the bow. Encamp around her; let no one escape. Repay her according to her deeds; do to her according to all that she has done. For she has proudly defied the Lord, the Holy One of Israel" (ESV).

Indeed, if anyone reads verse 8, "O Daughter of Babylon, doomed to be devastated, blessed will be the one who repays you with the recompense with which you have done to us!", it certainly sounds redundant because of the wordy phrase. However, many English Bibles (ESV, HCSB, KJV, NASB, NET, NIV, NKJV, NLT, NRSV, RSV) and commentators (Allen 2002:302; Briggs & Briggs 1906:486; Delizsch 1949:331; VanGemeren 2005:952) retain this phrase.

Among these scholars, Briggs and Briggs explain that this phrase (v. 8a) should be retained because the insertion intensifies the theme of retribution "at the expense of the measure" (Briggs & Briggs 1906:486). Likewise, VanGemeren says that this insertion speaks of the purpose of imprecation (VanGemeren 1991:829). Allen gives more insight on this issuen. Verse 7 and verse 9 match verse 1 and verse 4. Allen says verse 7 and verse 9 echo verse 1 and verse 4, specifically לנו "to us" echoes verse 3 – the suffixes of a series of "… נו(שובי) … נו(שאלו) "those who captured 'us'… ask of 'us'" (Allen 2002:302). Because the insertion does play an important role in this psalm – putting emphasis on theme of retribution, this study includes it.

3.3 Form criticism – classification of *genre*[68]

3.3.1 Introduction

Classifying the *genre* of this psalm is "confusing" (Zenger 2005:513) and "difficult" because it has "mixed types: communal lament (vv. 1-4), a song of Zion (vv. 5-6), and a curse (vv. 7-9)" (VanGemeren 2005:948). A. A. Anderson correctly says that the *genre* of this psalm depends on which verses the emphasis falls (Anderson 1972:896). However, despite its "confusing" nature, many scholars understand Psalm 137 as a communal lament (Dahood 1970:269; DeClaissé-Walford 2014:953; Kraus 1993:501; Longman 2014:449). These scholars who define this psalm as a communal lament also recognize the elements of Zion songs and imprecations within. What is the *genre* of this psalm? Is it an imprecatory psalm or a communal lament psalm? Can it be both? If the *genre* is imprecatory psalm, can it be regarded as one of various *genres* of the psalms like royal, wisdom psalm or thanksgiving psalm?

In order to accomplish this task, Gunkel's form critical approach is utilised (Gunkel 1998:1-21). Gunkel's form critical work according to its *Sitz im Leben* from which each form arose, has been dominantly influential in Psalm studies as well as Old Testament studies (Howard 1999:329). As Wevers well notes, it is "a dictum of Psalm studies that an investigation of literary patterns is basic to progress" (Wevers 1956:80). In Psalm studies, form criticism, that is, classifying a psalm

[68] According to Wendland, *genre* also means "class" or "type" referring "to a group of oral or written texts that are similar to one another in some recognizable ways, whether with respect to form, content, function, or usage. This is important because the way we interpret a given literary text is guided to a great extent by our identification of its *genre*" (Wendland 1998:31).

became the "*sine qua non*" (an essential condition) that scholars tend to do first in Psalm exegesis (Wevers 1956:80).

Before form critical analysis, it is necessary to discuss whether the term, "Imprecatory Psalm" *per se* is appropriate to be used for further discussion. Johannes G. Vos suggests that the term "imprecatory psalm" is a "proper designation"[69] because it properly invokes "a judgment, calamity or curse" (Vos 1942:123). Likewise J. Carl Laney understands that imprecation is "a major element or leading future"[70] in the imprecatory psalms (Laney 1981:36). Similarly, John N. Day called psalms like 137 "imprecatory psalm" because they *per se* express "the desire for God's vengeance to fall on His (and His people's) enemies and include the use of actual curses, or imprecations" (Day 2002:166). Interestingly, R. K. Harrison classifies the psalm as Imprecatory Psalm[71] arguing that they constitute "a reply to the national enemies, and [call] upon God to exercise retribution" (Harrison 1969:997). Likewise, Daniel Simango and Paul P Krüger use the term "Imprecatory Psalm" in their monograph, because the term, imprecation represents a "major thrust of a particular psalm" (Simango & Krüger 2016:583). They say that the term represents "lament, petition and desires before God" (Simango and Krüger 2016:583). However, there are scholars who are not comfortable with the term, rejecting it as misleading. Chalmers Martin argues that, "there are in the whole *Psalter* not more than eighteen psalms that contain any element of imprecation, and, in most of these, this element is a very minor one, embodied in a single line, it may be in a single verse"[72] (Martin 1972:113). For this reason, Martin argues that the appropriate term is "imprecations in the Psalms",[73] not Imprecatory Psalms. Ernst R. Wendland understands it in a slightly different way. He acknowledges that the term,

[69] Vos also mentions an inappropriate term suggested by other scholars: psalms of justice. Moreover, he says that the term "imprecatory" should not be understood as "wicked" or "immoral"; thus this term is appropriate (Vos 1942:123).

[70] His argument is followed by Leupold who argues, "the writer prays that God may afflict the evildoer and punish him according to his just deserts" (Leupold 1961:36).

[71] There are eight types of psalms in the *Psalter* according to Harrison, as follows, "Prayer, praises, penitential, intercessions, confessions of faith, homiletical, imprecatory and problems of the moral order." Harrison acknowledges the difficult nature of classifying the psalms "when a particular psalm can be assigned to more than one category. This fact, however, need not vitiate the classification as such, since the ancient writers generally did not observe rigid lines of type-demarcation when composing their psalms." (Harrison 1969:996-997).

[72] Martin says that the eighteen psalms of imprecation "contain three hundred and sixty-eight verses, of which only sixty-five include anything that can be called an imprecation. Even in the case of the three psalms which show the largest measure of the imprecatory spirit, only twenty-three verses out of a total of ninety-five can be properly said to be imprecations." (Martin 1972:113).

[73] For this reason, Martin discusses on this topic under the title, "Imprecations in the Psalms" (Martin 1972:113).

"Imprecatory Psalm" is misleading without any explanation (Wendland 1998:48). Wendland understands what it is known as Imprecatory Psalms rather as "Psalms of retribution,"[74] which fall under prayers of petition in which "the psalmist requests the Lord not only to deliver him (and/or God's people), but also to *punish* the wicked" (Wendland 1998:47).

Thus, the first group of scholars understands Imprecatory Psalms as a major *genre* while the second group understands them as a minor (or a sub-) one. The difference between the major and minor *genres* is that the latter appears as "part of a psalm" in which the psalm is first classified according to a major function (Wendland 1998:32). In other words, minor *genres* are part of major ones, and appear in the psalms where major ones appear. In the psalms in which there are no major *genres*, there are no minor ones. They are sub-*genres* that belong to major ones.

Is there a middle ground between these two terms: Imprecatory Psalm and imprecations in psalms? Interestingly, Frederic Putnam, who understands Imprecatory Psalms as a sub-*genre* belonging to laments, defines psalms like psalm 137 as "Imprecatory Lament"[75] because this lament contains "imprecations of extraordinary degree – the destruction or annihilation of the enemies of the psalmist" (Putnam 1980:8). The term, "Imprecatory Lament" reflects any lament psalm that contains both elements of imprecations within. Among the above-mentioned scholars, especially Martin's argument is not strong enough for *genre*-discussion of this psalm because even though the term imprecation appears to be "a very minor one" throughout the *Psalter*, the term imprecation seems to play an important role because it certainly speaks of various important themes like judgment and retribution, in connection with the term/theme, imprecation. Thus, the term "imprecatory lament" will be used in this research, when necessary.

Having this issue in mind, we turn our discussion to the above-mentioned question: whether there is such a *genre* as Imprecatory Psalm or whether the term, imprecation should be considered as a theme appearing in a *genre* like a Lament Psalm.

[74] What Wendland means by retribution is that it is "an act of righteous 'retribution' (a just judgment) by which God defends his good name and shows he is truly God. Such an act of retribution will fulfill God's many promises of deliverance made to the obedient as well as his threats to punish the wicked (e.g., in Dt 27:24-26 and 28:15-29). By attacking God's covenant people, the enemy were, in effect, insulting God himself, and God will not tolerate such behavior (Ps 9:11-12)" (Wendland 1998:48).

[75] Putnam who coined the term "Imprecatory Psalm" maintains that this is "a working definition" and is "open to change and revision if that should prove necessary" (Putnam 1980:9).

3.3.2 *Genre* of Psalm 137

The psalms known as Imprecatory Prayers are categorized both as Individual Lament (Pss 5, 6, 11, 12, 35, 58, 59, 69, 70, 109, 140) and as Communal Lament (Pss 44, 60, 74, 79, 83) (Mynatt 2000:64). The reason for this is because in both Imprecatory and Lament Psalms the psalmist cries out to God for "vengeance on his enemies as part or all of the petition" (Mynatt 2000:64). His prayer goes beyond lament to the point of cursing his enemies. Thus, all Imprecatory Psalms are Lament Psalms but not all Lament Psalms are Imprecatory Psalms. In many Lament Psalms, the psalmist pray Imprecatory Prayers to God. There are no instances where the psalmist prays Imprecatory Prayers without praying lament prayers (Pss 5, 10, 17, 35, 58, 59, 69, 70, 79, 83, 109, 129, 137, 140). For example, the psalmists pray that God may punish "those who speak lies" and "the bloodthirsty and deceitful man" (v. 6) in the midst of his lament prayer (vv. 1-12).

Gunkel's classification indicates that Lament Psalm and Complaint Psalm are used interchangeably. An Imprecatory Psalm is a sub-type of the Lament/Complaint psalm. A psalm like 58, known as a Lament Psalm, contains various sub-types including imprecation. Gunkel sees imprecation as a "petition of the Individual and Communal complaint song" (Gunkel 1998:231).

The classification of Westermann, who closely follows Gunkel but with slight modification, is helpful understanding the *genre* of Imprecatory Psalm. According to the structure he elaborates, petition is found in both lament of the people (LP) and lament of the individual (LI) (Westermann 1981:52, 64). The following paradigm shows where petition is found in lament psalms:

LP	LI
Address Introductory Petition	Address, with an introductory cry for help and/or of turning to God.
Lament	Lament. (It has three subjects: Thou, O God …; I …; the foe …)
Confession of Trust	Confession of Trust (Contrasting the lament by the *waw* adversative.)
Petition (Double Wish)	Petition: (a) for God to be favorable (look … incline thyself … hear …); (b) for God to intervene (help … save …). Motifs designed to move God to intervene.

Vow of Praise	Assurance of being heard.
	Double wish (wish or petition that God will intervene against … and for …).
	Vow of praise
	Praise of God (only where the petition has been answered!) (Westermann 1981:52, 64).

What Westermann means by "double wish", which rarely[76] occurs throughout the psalms, is, "May God do thus to our enemies; may God do thus to us" (Westernmann 1981:52). In other words, the psalmist wishes that God may punish his enemies and that He may deliver him. Thus, imprecation appears throughout the psalms as part of a petition, that is, a double wish, asking God to pour out His anger against his enemies for his deliverance.[77]

Ronald Murphy explains how Westermann modifies Gunkel's classification. Murphy notes that Westermann deals specifically with the element that Gunkel neglected in his classification; it is the element of the change from lament (and complaint) to praise[78] (Murphy 1959:86). Murphy notes that Gunkel has done his discussion of classification with a "motif of certainty of being heard" (Murphy 1959:86). Murphy also notes that Westermann goes beyond Gunkel's "motif of certainty of being heard" to the point of praise (Murphy 1959:86).

Gunkel and Westermann's argument is followed by John Wevers who analyzes the individual complaint laments according to a certain "basic literary pattern" composed of at least 4 components: 1) "an invocation of the divine name – O YHWH", 2) "the complaint itself – not always explicit; however it is always present in some form", 3) prayer itself – asking God to "hear and answer the suppliant" in imperative or jussive moods, and 4) conclusions with "an expression of certainty or a vow on the part of the suppliant" (Wever 1956:80-81). Wever's classification is a slight modification of those of Gunkel and Westermann.

[76] Westermann says, "It probably belongs properly to the lament of the individual and was secondarily included in the lament of the people" (Westermann 1981:52).
[77] An example of LP is found in Ps 79, in which the psalmists prays to God against his enemies, "Pour out your anger!" (v. 6) and "Help us, O God of salvation! Deliver us!" (v. 9).
[78] Murphy says, "The concept of praise is a key factor even in W.'s treatment of the *Klagelied.* The laments he also calls *Bittpsalmen,* pleas for delivery from evil. If the plea is already heard *(erhörte Bitte),* such Pss form a special type of lament because they end on a note of factual praise, i.e., praising God for having acted" (Murphy 1959:85-86).

Slightly differently, Brueggemann explains how the components of Westermann's classification[79] serve as three functions (instead of four functions by Wever): 1) address,[80] 2) lament and petition or complaint,[81] and 3) acknowledgement that God has heard the complaint and petition (Brueggemann 1974:6-8). Moreover, there are sub-functions that belong to the three functions. The first component, address, is done in the "dialogical, covenantal[82] context", whereby God is "expected to intervene actively and powerfully because of previous commitment between the parties" (Brueggemann 1974:6). This address/dialogue is possible because of the covenantal relation between God and the lamenter. The second components, lament and petition, are the description of any pathetic and trouble situations that could possibly be thought of – "loneliness and a sense of abandonment, danger before enemies, shame and humiliation and death" (Brueggemann 1974:7).

It is interesting to note that there is a transition from the plural "we" to singular "I" in verse 5 and then, back to the plural "we" in verse 7. Does this necessarily make the psalm (especially vv. 5-6) an individual lament? Certainly the psalm begins as a communal lament (deClaissé-Walford 2014:952; VanGemeren 2005:948). The "I" in this psalm does not necessarily make verses 5-6 an individual lament; it is still a communal lament. There are at least two reasons for this. The first reason is to "draw attention to the psalmist's personal commitment" and the second is to "draw other people to identify with it" (Goldingay 2006:606). Moreover, while being in a foreign land, it was necessary for each each exile to make a personal "commitment to Zion" (Goldingay 2006:606). However, the phenomenon of the "mingle of individual and community voices" occurs elsewhere in the psalms (Pss 108 and 123 (DeClaissé-Walford 2014:952). This phenomenon happens in Psalm 137 because an individual person speaks and takes an oath "on behalf of the community of singers." After taking an oath, it returns to the community singers in verse 7. Therefore, the *genre* of Psalm 137 is a Communal Lament psalm that contains elements

[79] The components of Westermann's classification that Brueggemann lists are "address, complaint, petition, motivation, vow of offering and assurance of being heard" (Brueggemann 1974:6).
[80] The examples of the address Brueggemann uses are found in Pss 4:1; 5:1; 12:1; 16:1; 17:1.
[81] The references Brueggemann uses are Pss 6:2; 13:3; 22:14-15; 12; 38:5-6; 39:4-6 ("sickness"), Pss 31:33; 38:11 ("loneliness and a sense of abandonment"), Pss 6:8; 7:1-4; 13; 17:9; 13; 35:4; 38:12; 55:3; 56:2; 64:1-6 ("danger before enemies"), Pss 4:2; 22:6-7, 17; 69:19 ("shame and humiliation") and Pss 28:1; 59:3; 88:3-9 ("death") (Brueggemann 1974:7).
[82] The concept of "covenant" is important in order to understand imprecatory prayers in Pss and this is the reason the form critical understanding of imprecatory prayers should be dealt with first as the foundational step or the prerequisite for this entire research. We will come back to this concept very soon in this chapter.

of imprecation (judgment, retribution, etc.) (vv. 7-9) or a Communal Imprecatory Lament (vv. 1, 3, 7-9).

3.4 Historical background studies

Generally speaking, historical background studies on the psalms is not an easy task because the content of the book of Psalms ranges "from the early monarchy to a time after the exile (ca. 1000 to 400 BCE)" (Stuart 2002:130). Besides, most psalms "do not reveal their historical context" (Goldingay 2006:600). However, that is not the case with Psalm 137 because the psalm has a "reference to Jews exiled in Babylon" (Kraus 1993:501). Thus, without difficulty, the reader of Psalm 137 knows that the psalm has a "background in the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 BCE" (Goldingay 2006:600).

3.4.1 Date and setting

Even though dating Psalm 137 is a relatively easy task, there is an issue of how to translate the perfect verbs (ישבנו, בכינו, תלינו, שאלונו) in verses 1-3 of the psalm, and this is related to the dating issue. Translating them either as past or present tense depends on how one dates Psalm 137: exilic or post-exilic. The scholars who argue that Psalm 137 was composed during the exilic period get their evidence from the "clear" and "deplorable" description of the exiled people of the text (Briggs & Briggs 1906:485; Childs 1992:191; Freedman 1971:187; Holladay 1993:57). Among these scholars, Freedman argues for the composition during the exilic period because the psalm "echoes vividly the experience and emotions of those who were taken captive, and may, therefore, be assigned to the first generation of the Exiles … bridging the period from Jeremiah to Second Isaiah" (Freedman 1971:187).

On the contrary, scholars who argue that Psalm 137 was composed during the post-exilic period understand the psalm as a "melancholy recollection" of the experiences of the exiled people (Dahood 1970:269; Delitzsch 1949:332; Kellermann 1978:48; Ogden 1982:89; Weiser 1962:794). Among these scholars, Ulrich Kellermann argues that the exile is over because of the "logical difference" found between verses 1-3 and verses 4-9 (Kellermann 1978:48). In verse 3,

there is singing of a Zion song while in verse 6, there is singing of the song with a self-imprecation. Moreover, in verse 4, singing of God's song in a foreign land is forbidden while in verse 7, God is addressed in the song. Kellermann argues that this logical difference makes this psalm post-exilic. In addition, two occurrences of the particles שם ("there") make this psalm post-exilic (Kellermann 1978:49). Kirkpatrick's explanation for post-exilic dating is helpful, "the first sign of the ruins of the city and Temple well have moved the Psalmist" to curse his enemies, Babylon and the Edomites, and to ask God for vengeance (Kirkpatrick 1982:780).

There is another reason to consider this psalm as post-exilic. The date for the whole *Psalter* covers a time period from the early monarchy to some time after the exile (ca. 1000 to 400 BCE) (Stuart 2002:130). The date of Psalm 137 needs to be understood within its nearer context. Psalms 120-134 are called "songs of ascent" or "pilgrim songs" and stem from a postexilic setting. These are closely related to the Zion tradition in which "many theological and story of Israel themes are found" (Brueggemann & Bellinger 2014:550; Stuart 2002:142). Psalms 135-137 are "responses to the Ascents" (Psalms 120-134) (Stuart 2002:142). Both Psalms 135 and 136 praise God for the mighty deeds He has done for the people of Israel: "creation and election" (Ps 135) and "retelling of Israel's history" (Ps 136) respectively. If Psalms 135 and 136 are pilgrim songs, so is Psalm 137 because it describes the groaning about "the reality of the exile when pilgrimage was not possible." (Stuart 2002:142). If Psalm 137 along with Psalms 135 and 136 are the "response to the Ascents", it can be considered that all of them might have been composed at the same time, post-exile. Psalm 137 is the final psalm of the Ascents in which the people bemoan "the reality of the exile when pilgrimage was not possible" (Stuart 2002:142).

However, because the psalm has elements of both possibilities, scholars are inconclusive concerning this issue, saying the dating depends on where one may put the emphasis: on verses 1-3, which reflect the "pathos" of the first generation of the exile or on verses 5-9 with the adverb שם (there), which indicates the exile is over (Allen 2002:304; Ahn 2011:77; DeClaissé-Walford 2014:953; Kirkpatrick 1982:780).

Despite the uncertainty of dating this psalm, because the argument for post-exilic dating is more strong and persuasive, this study follows the latter group of the scholars and dates this psalm as post-exilic. Therefore, Psalm 137 is post-exilic.

3.4.2 Authorship

We have seen in the Translating and Textual note that a LXX version of this psalm has the title, "of David through Jeremiah".[83] This does not mean that David is the author of the psalm. Concerning this, Briggs and Briggs correctly say, "This certainly did not mean that it was composed by David, but that it was of the davidic type" (Briggs & Briggs 1906:485). Briggs and Briggs mean that Psalm 137 looks like a davidic lament (and imprecatory) psalm because the writer of Psalm 137 cries out to God with imprecation just as David does in various psalms (Pss 5, 17, 35, 58, 59, 69, 70, 109, 140). Likewise, the author cannot be Jeremiah either as the LXX's superscription indicates, because Jeremiah was a pre-exilic prophet from Judah, who "never was in Babylon" (Kirkpatrick 1982:780).

Then, who is the author? Technically speaking, the author is "unknown" (Williams 1989:471). It needs to be mentioned that a few scholars have attempted to identify the author of this psalm. Based on the fact that the author is not David and that the date of the psalm is post-exilic, it could be any one of the deported Judean people who came back from the exile. It is very likely that the author was a "Levite, who had taken part in the Temple music" and was "carried off to Babylon when the city fell in 586 B.C." (DeClaissé-Walford 2014:9-11, 953; Hossfeld & Zenger 2005:513-514; Kirkpatrick 1982:780; Williams 1989:472). To sum up, this study maintains that the author was a singer among the exiles who experienced the exile and had recently returned from it.

3.4.3 Themes and motifs

As already discussed, the *genre* of Psalm 137 is an Imprecatory Communal Lament because Imprecatory Psalm is a sub-*genre* of the Lament Psalms. Like many other commentators,

[83] See page 57 of this chapter for more information.

Williams identifies this psalm as a "combination of a lament and a psalm of cursing" (Williams 1989:471). Thus, imprecation is the main theme that plays an important role in Psalm 137. What makes the psalm an imprecation is found in the last three verses: imprecations against Edom and Babylon (vv. 7-9).

Slightly differently, Dahood identifies this psalm as a vengeful prayer because he recognizes that the psalmist, "recently returned" from the exile and prays for vengeance on his and Israel's enemies – the Babylonians and the Edomites (Dahood 1970:269). Likewise, Kraus identifies the main theme of this psalm as imprecations against the enemies and explains that especially the curse against Edom plays an important role in this psalm and other related imprecatory passages (Ps 79:10 ff.; Lm 1:20-22; 3:64 ff.) because "Edom at the time of the destruction of Jerusalem went over to the enemies' side and maliciously took pleasure in the collapse of the holy city" (Kraus 1993:503). Besides that, the imprecation in verses 8-9, replete with curses against Babylon – retribution and dashing babies – is also a "gruesome" theme (Kraus 1993:504).

However, Terrien identifies the main theme of this psalm as "the memory of Zion," focusing on verses 4-6, the central core of the psalm (Terrien 2003:865). Terrien argues that remembering Zion in verses 4-6 is the clue to the meaning of the imprecation of the psalm (Terrien 2003:865). The destruction of Jerusalem was the worst thing that ever happened to Judah because Jerusalem was the place where God was worshipped. Shepherd explains that the "close association of the holy city with Yahweh" is the psalmist's "primary concern" (Shepherd 1997:41). For this reason, the exiled people could not sing but only remembered Jerusalem, even though their captors and tormenters demanded them to sing (vv. 3-6).

Thus, scholars vary concerning the central theme of the psalm. Each scholar's argument seems to represent the main theme of the psalm because themes like lament, curse, imprecation against the enemies, remembering Zion and so on are all found in the psalm. Thus, the issue is not about what the main theme of the psalm would be, but about how the themes are related to one another in the psalm. What can be certain at this point is that because the *genre* of the psalm is Communal Imprecatory Lament or Communal Lament with the sub-*genre* of imprecation, other themes found in the psalm must be considered with the *genre* in mind. Thus, the next section will

draw out the themes of the psalm uttered by the psalmist by means of analyzing the psalm structurally and thematically. This section also investigates how the themes of the psalm are related to one another. Dealing with the themes of the imprecatory lament like Psalm 137 will lay a foundation for reading the psalm in the canonical context of the whole *Psalter* and of the Old Testament.

3.5 Curses in the ancient near eastern context

The curse theme that appears in the Psalter and rest of Scripture shares common features with the ancient Near Eastern (ANE) curse and treaty tradition (Day 2005:36; Walton 1989:95). There are at least four types ANE treaty-curses according to Delbert Hillers and they are: "1) the curse by the gods or by a single god, 2) the simile curse, 3) the simple malediction and 4) futility curses" (Hillers 1964:12-29). Certainly these types show parallels with the curses of the Old Testament. God is invoked to curse and judge his covenant-breaking people. Moreover, lists of malediction and futility curses are found in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomny 28 (Hillers 1964:26-42).

Because of the Biblical parallel[84] with the ANE in terms of shared common features, especially the curse theme, it is fundamentally important to discuss the theme in its cultural context before considering it in the canonical context. TANE literature is replete with curses (Althann 1992:2). The literature shows how gods were called on to bring judgment on the vassal who failed to keep treaty obligations (Althann 1992:2). Papyrus Harris[85] from ancient Egypt shows how Ramses III describes the taking of a foreign people into captivity: "I destroyed the people of Seir, of the tribes of the Shasu; I plundered their tents of their people, their possessions, their cattle likewise, without number. They were pinioned and brought as captive, as tribute of Egypt. I gave them to the gods, as slaves into their house[s]" (Breasted 2001:87, §151; 201, §404).

Similarly, one Assyrian royal inscription shows how the Assyrian king Tukulti-Ninurta I performed punishments on rebellious cities: "In that year five fortified cities of the land Katmuhu, rebellious capitals, which, during a deceitful peace, had dragged off my people (and) plundered

[84] For more discussion on biblical parallels with the ancient Near East, see (Althann 1992:1-11), (Hillers 1964:43-89), (Niehaus 2008:13-33) and (Thompson 1964:18-24).
[85] For a detailed discussion concerning Papyrus Harris, see (Breated 2001:87-101, §151-181).

my land, I conquered in the fullness of time. I carried off captives (and) property (and) brought (them) to my city, Assur" (Grayson 1987:235). "I conquered the great cult centre of the land Purulimzu. I burnt them (the inhabitants) alive (and) the remnants of [their] army I took as captives" (Grayson 1987:236).

The idea that gods punish the treaty-breaking vassal also permeates the Old Testament. In the Psalms, as Robert Althann explains, there are many passages in which the enemies of the psalmist/God become the object of God's judgment (7:17; 21:11; 68:22; 69:24; 74:13-14; 140:11) (Althann 1992:2-3). Some of the examples that Althan provides for the similarity between the Psalms and the ANE literature are as follows: "You will destroy their offspring from the earth, and their children from among the sons of men" (Ps 21:11); "May Zarpanitu, who grants offspring and descendants, eradicate your offspring and descendants from the land" (Esarhaddon); "May their eyes grow too dim to see" (Ps 69:24); "May Ba'lu make you blind" (Ugaritic) (Althann 1992:2-3).

The idea of a covenantal relationship between God and his people is expressed in the suzerain-vassal treaty of the ANE, "where one party transparently imposes its will on the other" (Sarna 1991:102). The arrival at Sinai (Ex 19) after the Exodus is the incident that makes Israel "inextricably bound to God by a covenantal relationship" (Sarna 1991:102).

The certain treaty/covenant patterns that appear in Exodus 19:3-8 and 20:1-17 correspond to the literary patterns attested in the ANE suzerain-vassal treaties (Thompson 1964:21). Below is a parallel between the ANE Treaty form and Exodus 19-20:

	Form of ANE Treaties	Exodus 19, 20
Preamble	shows the parties involved in the covenant treaty in which the words of the suzerain king are addressed.	"Moses went up to God, and YHWH called to him out of the mountain, saying, Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the sons of Israel" (19:3). "I am YHWH your God" (20:2a).
Historical Prologue	emphasizes the "past relationship between the two parties" by listing the events that the suzerain king performed for the sake of the	"You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings, and brought you to myself" (19:4).

	vassal.	"who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery" (20:2b).
Stipulations	the vassal is obliged to be loyal to the suzerain king by keeping all the requirements associated with the covenant.	Decalogue (20:4-17)
Blessings and curses	the vassal will receive the suzerain's blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience. (Day 2005:38; Thompson 1964:21-22); Walton 1989:101-107).	"Then you shall be a valued property to me from among all peoples … and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation" (19:5b, 6a). "I YHWH your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, upon the third and upon the fourth generation of them that hate me (20:5b). YHWH will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain" (20:7b).

Thus, the treaty/covenant form indicates that the curse is the consequence of the vassal/Israel's disobedience. What can be seen from the treaty/covenant form of both the ANE and the Bible is that, as Jeffrey Niehaus explains, the curse that comes upon the vassal/Israel takes place at a househoud, coporporate level, not just an individual one (Niehaus 2008: 138-140). The curse comes upon anyone who breaks the covenant and his household, which is "the most severe form of punishment" in the ANE context (Niehaus 2008:152).

For this reason, John Day maintains that imprecatory psalms can be understood once they are considered in connection with the proper understanding of the treaty curses of the ANE (Day 2005:38). Certainly the theme of the destruction of a covenant breaker and his household in the ANE is likewise dominant throughout Israelite history in the Old Testament period (Niehaus 2008:152).

Ever since the Exodus, the Israelites were subjected to the curse of household destruction due to their habitual covenant breaking, which eventually led to the exile. The Israelites experienced the curse of destruction that had the characteristics of the treaty curse. An example of a curse that took place in the pre-exilic period is found in Jeremiah 14:15-16, where the prophet Jeremiah

utters the oracle of judgment against the people of Judah and their false prophets: "By sword and famine, those prophets will perish. And the people to whom they prophesy will be cast out in the streets of Jerusalem because of the famine and sword. There will be no one to bury them – them, their wives, their sons, and their daughters, for I will pour out their evil on them." Another example is an extreme one, namely the curse of the destruction of Jerusalem at the hand of Nebuchadnezzar in the days of the Judean king Jehoiachin: "He (Nebuchadnezzar) took Jehoiachin into exile to Babaylon. He also took from Jerusalem to Babylon the king's mother, his wives, his officials and the leading men of the land" (2 Ki 24:15).

The curse that appears in Psalm 137 can be considered according to its ANE context. The curse that seeks the death of the enemies' infants is characteristic of the ANE treaty tradition. At a certain point, Judah became a vassal of Babylon (2 Ki 24:1-7).

3.6 Close Reading of Psalm 137

3.6.1 Detailed structural analysis

Geographically, there are "references to places" in this psalm: Babylon/Edom, and Zion/Jerusalem (Schaefer 2001:323). The Psalm is chiastically framed in verse 1a and verses 8-9 by mentioning Babylon, a foreign land in which the exiled people cannot sing to God but against which they uttered curses (Waltner 2006:651). The psalmist contrasts Babylon with Jerusalem; by the rivers in Babylon (v. 1), he swears not to forget Jerusalem (vv. 5-6), and asks God for revenge on Babylon (vv. 8-9) (Berlin 2005:66). Concerning the chiasm of the psalm, Schaefer says, "The poem begins along the watercourses of Babylon with the tears coursing down the faces of deported Jews and concludes with lifeless Babylon dashed against the bare rock" (Schaefer 2001:323). According to the chiastic structure of the psalm, Jerusalem is in the middle (vv. 5-6) of the pericope. Here is the chiastic pattern of verses 5-6:

A If I forget you, O Jerusalem,
  B let my right hand wither!
  B' Let my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth
A' if I do not remember you (Schaefer 2001:322).

The chiastic position of Jerusalem needs to be emphasized because one of the purposes of chiasm is "to indicate where the emphasis falls, namely on the central element" (Greidanus 1988:63). Moreover, the central element in chiasm "condenses the meaning of the whole structure" (Mali 2009:90). In our case, the emphasis falls on Jerusalem – specifically, remembering Jerusalem in a foreign land. For this reason, curses against Babylon ("dashing their babies") must be considered and discussed in connection with Jerusalem and the exiled people. Goldingay explains that it is Jerusalem that needs to be "mindfully" focused, saying, "Being mindful" implies not just an accidental remembering but a deliberate focusing of attention and thought, a focused mindfulness on the part of a community gathered for recollection" (Goldingay 2008:603). Likewise, Samuel Terrien argues that the second strophe of the psalm (vv. 4-6) "provides the key to the whole psalm" – that is, "the memory of Zion" (Terrien 2003:865).

However, Tucker argues that the "object of scrutiny" is not Jerusalem but Babylon because it is depicted here as the "oppressive power" that the psalmist wishes to be destroyed according to his imprecatory prayer (Tucker 2014:121). The problem is that Tucker seems to have overlooked the importance of the central element in the chiasm – Jerusalem. Moreover, Tucker does not provide any reason or evidence why it is Babylon that should be scrutinized. Agreeing with Goldingay and Terrien, this study considers Jerusalem as the central and key element just as the chiastic structure indicates. As Terrien explains, the central element of a chiastic structure is often found in Lament or Complaint Psalms (Terrien 2003:865).[86] What can be known from this chiastic structure is that because Jerusalem is the central element, the focus of the pericope is not so much Babylon as Jerusalem. And once Jerusalem in the context of the exile[87] is studied, the curse against Babylon will be understood. Therefore, before Babylon is considered, Jerusalem needs to be first considered. It is worthwhile to note that not only does the middle strophe (vv. 5-

[86] In his discussion on the form of Ps 137, Terrien says, "It consists of three strophes, symmetrically made of two substrophes. As in many other laments or complaints, its central core, which in this psalm comprises the entire second strophe (vv. 4-6), provides the key to the meaning of the whole Ps, the memory of Zion" (Terrien 2003:865). Terrien divides Ps 137 into three strophes: "Strophe 1: The Melancholy of the Deportees (vv. 1-3), Strophe 2: The Memory of Jerusalem (vv. 4-6), Strophe 3: Imprecations on Edom and Babel (vv. 7-9)" (Terrien 2003:866-867).

[87] It is interesting to note how scholars title this psalm. Those scholars who consider Jerusalem as the central element: "If I forget thee, Jerusalem" (Terrien 2003:865), "Being Mindful of Jerusalem" (Goldingay 2006:599)." On the contrary, those who consider Babylon as the central element entitle this psalm as follows, "By the Waters of Babylon" (Weiser 1962:793), "At the Streams of Babylon…" (Kraus 1993:500), "Beside the Rivers of Babylon" (DeClaisse-Walford 2014:953), "Recalling the Power of Empire" (Tucker 2014:119).

6) contain a reference to Jerusalem, the rest of the strophes contain references to places, and Psalm 137 has a chiastic structure as follows,

A Babylon (v. 1ab)
  B Zion (v. 1c)
    C Zion (vv. 2-3)
      D foreign land (v. 4)
        E "you, O Jerusalem" (vv. 5-6)
      D' Edom (v. 7a)
    C' Jerusalem (v. 7a)
  B' Jerusalem (v. 7b)
A' Babylon (vv. 8-9) (Schaefer 2001:322).

This geographically structured passage is thematically structured as well. Each strophe that addresses places has thematic implications. Despite some slight disagreements, scholars agree that the second strophe refers to Jerusalem/Zion. Schaefer notes that the psalmist begins with "the self and the memory (vv. 1-4), moves to Jerusalem (vv. 5-6) and on to the LORD and Babylon (vv. 7-9)" (Schaefer 2001:322). In other words, the psalm begins with "By the rivers in Babylon", which is the "foreign setting" to the psalmist, with the tears coming down "the faces of deported Jews" and concludes with the curse against the Babylon by dashing the little children against the rock (Schaefer 2001:323). In the Babylonian exile, the psalmist prays to God "to intervene, to awaken his mercy, and to call forth his aid" (Kraus 1992:127). Thus, in this psalm, it is noticeable that the psalmist moves from one topic to another. He addresses the following topics: weeping and singing at Babylon (v. 1-3), torture (v. 3), being mindful of Jerusalem (vv. 5-6) and retribution and revenge against Babylon (vv. 8-9). So the topics that the psalmist delineates in Psalm 137 are as follows:

[Framing context: Judah's exile in Babylon (v. 1a)]
(A) The setting – the deportees' weeping and singing (vv. 1-4)
    * Weeping in a foreign land (vv. 1-2)
    * "Ironic" reversal of a Zion song (v. 3)
    * The central lamenting words – "How can we sing!" (v. 4)
(B) Remembering Jerusalem (vv. 5-6)
    * An oath to commit to Jerusalem (vv. 5-6)
    * Self-imprecation (vv. 5-6)
(C) Imprecations against the enemies (on Jerusalem's behalf) (vv. 7-9)
    * A plea on Jerusalem's behalf (v. 7)
    * Imprecations against the Edomites and Babylon (vv. 8-9)
[Framing context: Judah's imprecation against Babylon (vv. 8-9)]

Each topic (strophe) is geographically related to one another. The framing context of this psalm is Babylon. (A) The exiles are forced to sing "songs of Zion" in "a foreign land, Babylon," (B) remembering "Jerusalem," (C) uttering imprecations against their enemies: the people of "Edom" and "Babylon." Thus, each topic related to a geographical location has thematic implications.

In addition to the each topic's geographical and thematic implications, each topic (strophe) is somehow related to topics that precede it and follow it in the psalm. At first glance, the relationship between topic (A) and topic (B) does not seem clear. However, as commentators note, a song of Zion – an important theme, that the exiles were forced to sing, but cannot sing in verses 1-4, is continued in verses 5-6, "I will never forget Jerusalem; the city of God I count among my greatest joys!" (Kraus 1993:503).

Zion, the name of the mountain in Jerusalem, is "often synonymous with Jerusalem" (Ross 2013:126; Henderson 2014:15) because it "often represents the location of the sanctuary situated on an elevated location" in Jerusalem (Klouda 2008:936). Zion "denotes the location of Yahweh's dwelling place and immediate presence, symbolizing a place of security or safety (Pss 46:4-5; 76:2-3)" (Klouda 2008:936). Topic (A) and topic (B) are logically connected one another, for Zion and Jerusalem are interchangeably used in Psalms. The lack of the term Zion in topic (B) and the term Jerusalem (A) does not necessarily mean they are not related each other. Thus, remembering Zion (especially v. 1) in topic (A) and remembering Jerusalem (especially v. 6) in topic (B) connect thematically.

The exiled Israelites wept because as for them, the defeat of Zion/Jerusalem meant the "departure of God's presence" (Klouda 2008:940). Their weeping is not so much the fact that they are now in a foreign land tormented and tortured as the fact that God is not with them anymore. Thus, remembering Zion (the presence of God)[88] leads to a consideration of the 'weeping/lamenting' theme for there is no "security" or "protection" for the exiles. For this

[88] Susan Gillingham recognizes "Zion Markers" that identify the psalms that "advance the Zion tradition" both in Zion psalms and psalms that do "not explicitly refer to Zion" and they are [individual laments] "your dwelling (Pss 43:4 and 84:2)," "dwelling place (Pss 87:2 and 132:5)," "house of God (Ps 42:5)," "your house (Ps 84:5)"; [Zion hymns] "city of God (Ps 101:8)," "city of our God (Ps 48:2)," "his holy mountain (Ps 48:2)," "dwelling of Jacob (Ps 87:2)"; [communal laments] "Jacob" as the people of God (Pss 44:5 and 85:3)," "steadfast love" (Pss 44:27 and 85:11)" (Gillingham 2005:323).

reason, the exiled people showed "the deepest grief" and "longings" for Zion, demanded by their tormentor to sing "songs of Zion" (Klouda 2008:940). However, the phrase in verse 4, "no songs of Zion in a foreign land," is an "ironic" reversal or a "modified"[89] songs of Zion because it is a song of Zion in Babylon.[90] The captors' mocking of the exiled Israelites "sing songs of Zion!" was something they could not even think of because only Zion/Jerusalem was the proper place in which Yahweh was praised and glorified; this is what Zion songs are all about (Kraus 1993:503). Zion songs cannot be sung in a foreign land like Babylon because "cultic practice is not possible here" (cf. 1 Sm 26:19; Hs 9:3 ff.), and because "the land is unclean" (cf. Ezk 4:13) (Kraus 1993:503). Moreover, because the captors forced them to sing "songs of Zion" in Babylon, they exclaimed with fear, "How can we sing!" (v. 4).

The exiled Israelites' lament needs to be discussed with the concept of the "inviolability of Zion." The place named Zion has two functions on behalf of God's people: God's presence and protection.[91] This concept serves as a "hallmark feature of the Zion tradition". Zion is "exempt from domination or conquest by foreign leaders (Ps 46:5-6)" (Klouda 2008:936)." As several psalms indicate (Pss 46:8-11; 48:4-8; 76:4-9), as they sing to YHWH, the psalmists have faith that "YHWH will not allow his holy city to fall into the hands of Israel's adversaries" (Klouda 2008:936) because Zion is God's "chosen dwelling place" and Zion is where God "reveals Himself" (Kraus 1993:109).

In commenting on Psalm 76, a song of Zion which is characterized as "devotion to Zion as the center of Yahweh's presence with his people," Tate says that the reason for the songs of Zion is "Yahweh's deliverance of Israel from her military foe" (Tate 1990:263). Specifically, this psalm "celebrates the powerful theophanic victories of Yahweh over his foes and the forces of disorders"

[89] Slightly different from other scholars, Allen calls this psalm "a modified version of a song of Zion" because of the very opposite situation that the exiled people are facing. Allen explains, "The typical narrative passage celebrating the impregnability of Zion and its divine protection has to give way to a report of mourning in a foreign land. The normal trilogy of Yahweh, Zion, and defeated foe is replaced by a tragic threesome of the victorious enemy, Zion, and the defeated nation, with Yahweh very conspicuous by absence except as a figure of past tradition (v 4). The misery of verses 1-3 is accentuated in the Hebrew by ninefold repetition of the ending –nu ("we," "our"), which carries a ring of pathos, as in Is 53:4-6" (Allen 2002:307).

[90] The Ps as a whole is "shaped by the contrast between 'Babylon' and 'Zion/Jerusalem'" (Hossfeld & Zenger 2005:512).

[91] See Pss 46:4-5 and 76:2-3, where Zion has symbolically a meaning of "a place of security and safety" (Klouda 2008:936).

(Tate 1990:266). Moreover, Zion is where God "has come to establish his lair as the mighty Lion-Warrior[92] of Israel" (Tate 1990:266). Verses 3-6 of Psalm 76 describe the events in which God as the Divine Warrior defeated the enemies for Israel: "the Red Sea event, the conquest of the land, and later events such as the defeated of the Assyrian invasion" (Goldingay 2006:452). As the setting of the psalm itself shows well, God's people are experiencing the worst moments probably in the entire biblical history of Israel. They experienced the siege and destruction of Jerusalem (which is inviolable!) and were forced to relocate to Babylon. They found themselves without a homeland. The exiles probably began to realize that God, the Divine Warrior who fights for her against her enemies "also appears as an enemy who fights against Israel"[93] (Kelle 2008:831).

The topic (B) is all about remembering (not forgetting!) Jerusalem and begins with self-imprecation (Bergant 2013:129; Kraus 1993:503). Just as topic (A) is a(n) (inverted version of) song of Zion, so is topic (B). The self-imprecation[94] sprang out of the psalmist ("an individual psalm-singer, speaking on behalf of the community singers")[95] (DeClaissé-Walford 2014:955). The plural subject "we" becomes singular "I" in verses 5-6 and then plural "we" in verses 7-9, the commitment to Jerusalem. Kraus correctly says, "These declarations and confessions, couched in the form of a self-imprecation, are unquestionably a glorification of Zion" (Kraus 1993:503). The psalmist makes an oath and commits to remember Jerusalem with a self-curse

[92] God as the "Divine Warrior" is a theme that appears throughout the Bible especially in the Psalms. B. E. Kelle explains as follows, "Within the OT wisdom, poetry and writings the primary manifestation of the divine warrior is Yahweh fighting against Israel's enemies. This imagery takes several forms: (1) Yahweh fighting alone, sometimes by miracle without any physical means and other times by using weapons (Pss 7:12-13; 59:11-12; 64:7); (2) Yahweh using elements of nature such as fire, lightning and hail as weapons to fight Israel's battles (Pss 18:12-19; 68:8-10; 83:13-18; 97:3-5); (3) Yahweh leading a divine army of heavenly being to fight Israel's battles (Ps 34:7; cf. 2 Ki 6:8-23), an image represented by the divine title *yhwh seba'ot* ("LORD of Hosts"), which literally translates "LORD of armies (e.g., Ps 24:10); (4) Yahweh serving explicitly or implicitly as the commander of Israel's army as it goes into war (Pss 18:34; 44:9; 60:10; 124:2-3)" see (Kelle 2008:831).

[93] The scriptural passages to which Kelle refers are for example: "The book of Lamentations, for example, uses explicit military language to describe Yahweh's role in Jerusalem's destruction: 'The LORD has become like an enemy; he has swallowed up Israel . . . and he has caused the enemy to rejoice over you' (Lm 2:5, 17 NASB). Likewise, the communal lament psalms give expression to this imagery following defeat in battle (Pss 60:1, 10; 80; 89), and the speeches of Job personalize the imagery of Yahweh as enemy (Job 9:17-18; 16:12-14; 19:11-12; cf. Ps 38:1-8)" (Kelle 2008:831).

[94] The examples of the self-imprecations are found in Job 31:22 ("Then let my shoulder blade fall from my shoulder, and let my arm be broken from its socket." ESV); Ps 7:5 ("Let the enemy pursue my soul and overtake it, and let him trample my life to the ground and lay my glory in the dust. Selah", ESV).

[95] Examples of mixture of individual and communal voices in the Communal Lament Pss are found in Pss 108 and 123.

(topic B) because he (and the whole exiled community) cannot sing songs of Zion in a foreign land[96] (topic A).

Topic (C), which contains the imprecations, seems problematic because it does not seem to be juxtaposed with topics (A) and (B). The question arises, what does the imprecation have to do with (inverted) songs of Zion by dashing even the little children against the rock? As previously seen, this psalm is an Imprecatory Lament, meaning that the psalmist spoke the imprecation while lamenting. Topic (A) shows that the exiled people are in a miserable state. Topic (C) shows that the psalmist prays to God that his enemies should be punished and deported to a foreign land just as the exiled people experienced according to his prayer of retribution (v. 8) and imprecation (v. 9). The psalmist wants his enemies to face the same fate, that is, to be punished and weep in a foreign land like he and the exiled people did. The psalmist's lament – he cannot sing a Zion song – is expressed in topic (B) in which he takes an oath to remember Zion with self-imprecation (vv. 5-6).

Within the framing context of the psalm, that is, verse 1a (Judah's exile in Babylon) and verses 8-9 (Judah's imprecations against Babylon), the contrast between Zion/Jerusalem and Babylon becomes clearly distinguished. The following summarizes the relation between Zion and Babylon.

> Contrasted pair in topic (A): remembering Zion in Babylon
> Contrasted pair in topic (B): remembering Zion with an oath in Babylon.
> Contrasted pair in topic (C): let God remember Jerusalem against Babylon/Edom, that they be destroyed and their babies be dashed against rock.

In sum, Jerusalem/Zion is focused on here in the backdrop of Babylon and/or against Babylon.

[96] Zenger explains that "in a foreign land" has "religious and cultic" connotations rather than merely geographical ones saying, "the connotation here seems also to be that Babylon is not merely a 'foreign' place but also the 'soil' of the foreign gods. Crucial here is that, according to the accepted religious model, the conquest of Jerusalem with the destruction of the Temple of YHWH was also, or rather primarily, a religiously relevant action, namely, the victory of Marduk, the primary god of Babylon, over YHWH, the God of Jerusalem. A YHWH song, sung by the conquered and deported YHWH-musicians for the entertainment of the adherents of Marduk, in the midst of Babylon, was simply impossible – especially if the deportees wanted to hold fast to their faith in YHWH and remain true to their memory of Zion" (Zenger 2005:516).

3.6.2 Blessed are those who take revenge and those who dash the infants!

Having seen how the themes of the three topics above, we now turn to the imprecations in verses 7-9. These verses are problematic for at least two reasons: 1) the psalmist's usage of the word אשרי (*ashrei*) ("Blessed is…") seems contradictory to the entire biblical message,[97] especially the Psalms.[98] It certainly seems to promote harming others. Twice אשרי (*ashrei*) appears: both referring to Babylon seem to promote taking revenge and support killing the little children. 2) Scholars and commentators do not agree regarding how to understand and interpret this imprecation (just as we have seen in the previous chapter). The two reasons need to be paid attention to because these scholars do not provide any satisfactory answer to the meaning of this harshest language of cursing others. And this study seeks to go beyond the unsatisfactory answers in order to solve the problem.

The imprecations are uttered in the form of beatitudes, אשרי "blessed is". This word, occurring twenty six times in the book of Psalms and appearing as "the introductory word of a wisdom psalm", introduces imprecatory words only in this psalm (DeClaissé-Walford 2014:956). Moreover, אשרי "blessed is" has "cultic/sacred connotations" (DeClaissé-Walford 2014:956). The imprecations in the form of beatitudes in verses 7-9[99] must be considered in connection with the previous two sections: verses 1-4 and verses 5-6. The reason is because the word "זכר (to remember)" occurs in all three sections of the psalms. In verses 1-4, the exiled people remembered (בזכרנו "when I remembered"; temporal infinitive phrase). In verses 5-6, the exiled takes an oath to remember (אזכרכי "I remember you") at the moment of the exile. In verses 7-9, the psalmist asks God to remember the day on which Jerusalem fell against Edom (זכר…ל… "remember against"), upon whom God's judgment may soon come (Zenger 2005:518). Concerning this, Zenger explains,

[97] Throughout the Old Testament, the term, אשרי "blessed is" occurs indicating "happiness" and "blessedness", not cursing others; the references are Dt 33:29; 1 Ki 10:8; Job 5:17; Pr 14:21; 16:20; 20:7; 29:18; Ec 10:17; Is 32:20; 56:2.

[98] Ps 137:8-9 is the only occurrence where אשרי "blessed is" is used for cursing others (cf., Pss 1:1; 2:12; 32:1; 33:12; 84:5; 106:3; 112:1; 114:15; 119:2; 128:1).

[99] Goldingay calls verses 7-9 of the Ps "the declaration of confidence" because of God's words of promises found elsewhere in the Old Testament (Is 47:1; Jr 50:42) that promise God would punish and judge Babylon (Goldingay 2006:608-609). Thus, Babylon's fall is God's words "already" announced.

> While the theme of the two preceding sections was remembering on the part of the deportees or those returned from exile, the focus now is on YHWH's remembering Jerusalem. YHWH is supposed to remember the Edomites (Zenger 2005:518).

This is how the all three sections are related and one another. The expression, "…ל…זכר "remember against" needs to be paid attention to because it has "forensic" or "juridical" meaning[100] and has "its roots in the legal life of Ancient Israel"[101] (Kidner 2008:496). The idea of God as "the divine Judge" appears in this expression of "remember against" and this term is "restricted to Yahweh's remembering" (Childs 1962:32). Thus, even though the text does not say, "God is the Judge," it can still be argued that God is the Judge against Edom (v. 7) and against Babylon (vv. 8-9) as well. Moreover, because the expression, "remember against" has a negative connotation, verse 7 is an imprecation against the Edomites asking God to "remember and punish the conduct of the Edomites in the fatal day of Jerusalem's fall" (Kirkpatrick 1982:782). Because of the belief that God is their Judge, it is natural to see the Israelites ask God to remember the Edomites "on the evil day when Jerusalem was destroyed" (Zenger 2005:518).

Curse and revenge against Edom, moreover, is an important theme both in the book of Psalms and in the rest of the Old Testament, especially in the context of the fall of Jerusalem (Kraus 1989:03). The Edomites' ("brother-people related by descent to Israel") (Delitzsch 1949:335) sin was, as Kraus well summarizes, that they "at the time of the destruction of Jerusalem went over to the enemies' side and maliciously took pleasure in the collapse of the holy city" (Kraus 1989:503). Hatred between Edom and Israel, as Scripture indicates, goes back to the "patriarchal times with the story of Jacob and Esau" (Terrien 2003:867). The hatred became much more intense when Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon hired Edomite soldiers to encourage "the total annihilation of Israel's holy place" (Terrien 2003:867). The Bible describes the violence, evildoings and revenge that Edom did to Judah during Jerusalem's fall (Ezk 25:12-14; 35:5-9; Ob 8-15; Lm 1:20-22; 3:59-66; 4:21).

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[100] This sense of "remember" with the preposition "*l*^{e}" can be found in Neh 6:14 ("Remember Tobiah and Sanballat, O my God, according to these things that they did, and also the prophetess Noadiah and the rest of the prophets who wanted to make me afraid." ESV) and 13:29 ("Remember them, O my God, because they have desecrated the priesthood and the covenant of the priesthood and the Levites." ESV).

[101] Kidner (2008:496) refers to Brevard S. Childs for this quotation (Childs 1962:32). However, the preposition, "*l*^{e}" by itself has the function of "disadvantage" which can be translated as "against" and this kind of "*l*^{e}" is called "adversative *l*^{e}" (Williams 2007:107, §271b).

The imprecation against Babylon[102] is much harsher than the imprecation against Edom. Three curses are announced against Babylon: 1) Doomed to be destroyed (because of the "gerundive sense" – indicating "what should or may be done" (Williams 2007:89, §216); 2) Blessed are those who repay you with what you have done to us! (beginning with a beatitude formula – *ashrei*); and 3) Blessed are those who dash your little children against the rock (*ashrei* again).

The personified term "daughter Babylon" needs to be paid attention to because this term appears in the prophetical books in which "Babylon's fall" is announced (Is 47:1; Jr 50:42)" (Goldingay 2006:609). There appears the declaration of confidence made by the psalmist; devastating judgment must be done to "daughter Babylon". Just as the term indicates, the imprecation against Babylon seems understandable. We know from the fact that elsewhere like prophetic books speak of the doom of Babylon announced by the prophets, imprecations against enemies uttered by the psalmist are not "personal sentiments" but "divine announcements" (Luc 1999:398).

Because judgment against Babylon is already announced by the prophets of God, and God "has made promises concerning this matter," the psalmist is able to declare with confidence that God "will act as promised" and destroy Babylon (Goldingay 2006:609). Moreover, as the "passive participle (השדודה)" indicates, the judgment against Babylon is a future event (Goldingay 2006:609). Isaiah 13:6, a passage of the judgment of Babylon says, "Wail, for the day of the LORD is near; as destruction from the Almighty it will come." Because the judgment from God against Babylon is a future event, what can be interestingly known is that "devastation called down on Jerusalem by the Edomites ought now to be reversed onto Babylon itself" (Zenger 2005:519).

It is worth noting how the principle of retribution is applied and works in this passage. It is the psalmist who prays Imprecatory Prayer to God, but it is God, not the psalmist, who is "responsible for this destruction" and it is God's "own task", for the poet's task is "to trust YHWH to fulfill the promises they have been given" (Goldingay 2006:609). From the prophets,

[102] Unlike many commentators, Dahood and Goldingay do not translate the Hebrew phrase, "*bat-babel*" as "daughter of Babylon" but as "daughter Babylon" because they understand the syntactical function of "*bat*" of "*bat-Babel*" as "expositionatory or appositional" and as a "personification of the Babylonian empire" (Dahood 1970:273; Goldingay 2006:609). The daughter Babylon, "analogous to daughter Zion," is "responsible for the destruction and rape of "daughter Zion" (Zenger 2005:519).

the psalmist knows that God will recompense Babylon[103] in accordance with all the evil things Babylon did to Zion/Jerusalem (Goldingay 2006:609). Jeremiah 51 describes God as the Lord of recompense who repays Babylon on behalf of Jerusalem. Likewise, the book of Deuteronomy says that recompense/retribution belongs to God in harmony with "God's general pledge," 'I will repay' (Dt 7:10; 32:35) (Kidner 2008:496). Thus, the words of recompense begin with God even before they are spoke out of the prophet's and the psalmist's mouth. In other words, the retribution is "a response to Scripture as well as to events" (Kidner 2008:496).

Here is the harshest imprecation: "Blessed are those who dash the little children against the rock!" How is this to be understood? Does God allow the killing of little children? The "barbaric practice" of killing children needs to be considered in the ancient Near Eastern context (Allen 2002:309). Ancient Near Eastern warfare did not spare women and children "in a war of extermination" (Dahood 1970:273). Likewise, this brutal image of killing children without exception was performed in Israel. This practice is, in fact, "a recurrent OT image for what happens in war" (Goldingay 2008:609).

It is to be noted that the expression of Psalm 137:9, "dashing the little children" appears also elsewhere in the Old Testament. When judgment was announced, like foreign nations, Israel was no exception. The following are the occurrence of passages of "dashing the little children"; 2 Kings 8:12 (In Elisha's prophecy that Hazael, king of Aram will do evil things to Israel); Hosea 10:14 (In the prophetic words of Hosea that God will punish Israel); Nahum 3:10 (In Nahum's oracle against Nineveh) and Isaiah 13:16 (In Isaiah's oracle against Babylon).

The imprecation that the psalmist utters in vv. 8-9 is the same kind of imprecation that Judah already experienced by means of the warfare initiated by Babylon. When the Babylonian army attacked Jerusalem, they slaughtered the sons of the Judean king Zedekiah (2 Ki 25:7). The reason for killing the sons is "to make sure they would not become the focus of attempts to restore Davidic rule in Jerusalem" (Goldingay 2008:609). Slaughtering babies makes the annihilation of a nation possible (Terrien 2003:867).

[103] The devastation of Babylon really took place as Babylon was "conquered by the Persian king Cyrus in 539 BCE" (Weiser 1962:796).

Killing little children means total extermination because children are the future of a nation; no children, no future. Even little children have to be killed "in order that a new generation may not raise up again the world-wide dominion that has been overthrown" (Delitzsch 1949:337). Concerning this, Allen says, "In the light of verse 8 Judah had evidently itself suffered the fate of verse 9, and it is for this cultural expression of total warfare that demand is made. For the sake of divine justice their turn must come" (Allen 2002:308). Furthermore, it is God's vengeance, not human because human vengeance "misses the theocentric and somewhat noble attitude of 'Vengeance is mine, … saith the Lord'" (Terrien 2003:867). Imprecatory[104] Psalms lack personal vengeance. Vengeance belongs to God. In sum, the psalmist prays to God with confidence that God would recompense the evil that Babylon did to Israel because this is what God has spoken through the prophets and because vengeance belongs to God.

3.6.3 Synthesis

Based on what has been discussed, the remaining task is to put all the themes found in psalm 137 together as each theme is developed. The psalm consists of three parts as follows:

Inclusio: Judah in Babylon (v. 1a)
- A. The exiled remember Jerusalem (v. 1)
  - Lament of the psalmist/the exiled (vv. 1-2)
    - Babylon tortures exiled Judah (v. 3)
    - Lament of the psalmist/the exiled (v. 4)
- B. The exiled remember Jerusalem (vv. 5-6)
  - The exiled will never forget and certainly remember Jerusalem (vv. 5-6)
    - With an oath of self-imprecation (vv. 5-6)
  - Jerusalem is the highest joy (v. 6)
- C. God will remember Jerusalem against Edom and Babylon (vv. 7-9)
  - The psalmist prays:
    - That God will punish Edom and Babylon (vv. 7-9)
      - Repay Babylon (v. 8)
      - Kill the babies of Babylon (v. 9)

Inclusio: Judah against Babylon (vv. 8-9)

[104] It is worth noting that Goldingay says that the poet's imprecations are "not surprising" because they are the promises of God "made by the prophets" which God would eventually fulfill (Goldingay 2008:610). Thus, the idea that "Babylon might be punished" is not devised from scratch (Goldingay 2008:610). It begins with God's words.

The first iteration of the *inclusio* begins with the geographical setting, Babylon, to which the exiled people were forced to relocate unwillingly (v. 1a). This lament flows into part A, which begins with a lament while remembering Zion (vv. 1-2). Their lament intensifies when their tormenters ask them to sing Zion songs (v. 3).

The second section (Part B) begins with a rhetorical question, "How can we sing in a foreign land?", which are the central lamenting words. Verse 4 shows the reason why they could not sing at the demand of their tormenters. It is because they are in a foreign land (v. 4). The fact that they were in a foreign land, Babylon, was the reason for lament. They really wanted to sing Zion songs to God but could not because they were in a foreign land far away from Jerusalem. Because of their homage to Jerusalem, they made a self-imposed curse,[105] "If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand wither! Let my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth, if I do not remember you, if I do not set Jerusalem above my highest joy!" (vv. 5-6).

The third section (Part C) begins with the psalmist's imprecation, "O God, remember against the Edomites the day of Jerusalem!" (v. 7a). The psalmist prays that God may punish the Edomites who rejoiced over the destruction of Jerusalem, "Lay it bare, lay it bare, down to its foundations!" (v. 7cd, ESV). Then, the focus turns to personified Babylon. Certainly, all these themes of parts A and B are developed into the climax of the psalm with the use of the imprecatory words, "Doomed to be destroyed (ודההשד)", "repay (שישלם)" in verses 8 and 9. Verses 8 and 9 make anyone who repays Babylon with what Babylon did to Judah is to be called, "blessed."

Then, the psalm returns to the *inclusio*, "Judah against Babylon." This relation between Judah and Babylon is enveloped by the *inclusio* at the beginning of the psalm that indicates the relation between Judah and Babylon (Judah in Babylon[106]) (v. 1). The reader of Psalm 137 begins to understand that if the psalmist's Imprecatory Prayer is granted by God, God will punish and judge Babylon, even by killing the babies, and that Babylon will experience the judgment that Judah is experiencing now – living in a foreign land being tormented. If the prayer is granted and

[105] For more information on self-curse as part of smaller *genres* in the *Psalter*, see (Gunkel 1998:234-235).
[106] The relation between Jerusalem and Babylon can be expressed as "Babylon against Judah" because Babylon is the destroyer and tormenter of Jerusalem.

if there are more verses after verse 9, the verses will be about Babylon in a foreign land weeping like the exiled Judah weeping in a foreign land, Babylon (v. 1).

3.6.4 Theological themes

3.6.4.1 Introduction

From the analysis above, at least four themes appear as the foundational elements for the rest of this study: 1) Zion versus Babylon 2) lamenting – a modified Zion song, 3) remembering Jerusalem and remembering against Edom, and 4) the imprecation against Babylon that Babylon would experience the same fate Judah experienced. The following will explain how each of these themes is related to one another in order to fully understand the difficult nature of the Imprecatory Lament of the psalm and bring it into dialogue with the rest of the Old Testament canon.

3.6.4.2 Zion versus Babylon

This theme is chiastically structured in this psalm. This psalm is all about the relation between Zion and Babylon.[107] It begins with the theme of Babylon against Zion (by means of tormenting) and ends with the theme of Zion against Babylon (by means of cursing). Because of the evil things Babylon has done to Judah, the exiled people lamented (v. 1). They lamented because they were "so far removed" from Zion "where God is present and where the community worships" (Kraus 1992:66). Their lamenting and suffering[108] were not so much living as exiles in a foreign land as being alienated from Zion, the presence of God (Becking 2009:201-202). The psalmist of the exiles prays that God may destroy Babylon in the way that Babylon destroyed Judah – even dashing their babies against rock (vv. 8-9).

[107] Zenger explains, "Since the psalm as a whole is shaped by the contrast between 'Babylon' and 'Zion/Jerusalem,' the reference to 'Babel/Babylon' is not to the region or empire of Babylon but to the city of Babylon as the capital and imperial residence" (Zenger 2005:512).

[108] Bob Becking, in his article, "Does Exile Equal Suffering? A Fresh Look at Psalm 137", argues that because the Psalm describes the suffering of the Babylonian exile "albeit in a limited way" by omitting "physical suffering, such as hunger, oppression", the exilic people lived "in relatively good conditions". For more discussion regarding this, see (Becking 2009:183-202).

Psalm 137 *per se* is not enough to answer the question of how the psalmist's Imprecatory Prayer against Babylon will be granted by God who would actually judge them. The following chapters that bring Psalm 137 into dialogue with the rest of the Old Testament canon will deal with this theme more in detail. In doing so, we will consider a couple of passages that share the psalmist's imprecation against Babylon (e.g., Is 13 and Jr 51). The focus on this theme, Zion versus Babylon, will play an important role in our understanding of a) the theological contribution of Psalm 137 to the rest of the Old Testament canon, and b) the way in which the rest of the Old Testament canon can contribute our understanding of Psalm 137.

Another important theme that arises when considering the message of this psalm is that this psalm is theocentric (God-centered) (Zenger 1996:49). "Theocentricity" is what this whole psalm is "constitutive for" (Zenger 1996:49). The idea of "theocentricity" is significant because of God's relation to Zion. The psalmist lamented because of fear. What is the fear that he (and his fellow deported) felt as they were surrounded by their enemies in a foreign land? The fear arises not so much from the enemies' mocking and tormenting, but from the fact that "YHWH has abandoned YHWH's relationship[109]" to Zion/Jerusalem (Zenger 1996:49).

Because Zion is the place God has chosen as His dwelling place, "symbolizing a place of security or safety," the Judean people had an unshakable belief that Zion was inviolable (Klouda 2008:936). However, this belief was shattered when God destroyed Zion/Jerusalem by means of Babylon. Because the judgment on Jerusalem was pre-warned many times by the prophets of God, and because it was God who punished Jerusalem, and because it was God who even declared the judgment of Babylon, "neither Edom's fraternal betrayal nor the brutality of Babylon can be the last word" (Zenger 1996:49). In biblical texts of curses, God is "explicitly mentioned or implicitly present" and curse "derives its power solely from God" (Strawn 2008:315).

[109] Curse can be understood in connection with covenantal relationship with God. It is found in Deuteronomy that breaking of the covenant between God and Israel will bring out God's punishment and keeping of it will bring out God's blessings (Evans 2000:398). However, even though it can be expressed "in material terms," the curse has to do with "the relationship with God" (Evans 2000:398). The ultimate curse for Israel is "being out of relationship with God" (Evans 2000:398). For this reason, the most tragic thing that the deported people in Ps 137 are encountering is neither mocking nor torturing made by their tormenters, but the feeling of being out of the relationship with God.

3.6.4.3 Lamenting – a modified Zion song

As we have previously seen in the discussion of the *genre*, Psalm 137 is an Imprecatory Lament. The psalmist along with the exiled people, while lamenting, speaks out imprecations to God against his enemies. The first section of this psalm (vv. 1-4) indicates that the psalm begins with a Communal Lament ("determined by the opening of the Ps") – 'we sat and wept' (VanGemeren 2005:948), functions as a theme of this psalm as well. The first section of this psalm is continued by the next section (vv. 5-7) in which "a single singer from the lamenting assembly" prays to God (Kraus 1993:503). Then the last section of the psalm (vv. 8-9) returns to Communal Lament in which the psalmist speaks imprecations against Babylon.

As previously seen, the psalm is called a modified Zion song because the exiled people were forced to sing by the Babylonian tormenters but cannot sing because Zion songs cannot be sung in a foreign land (v. 3). Babylon is not the place God chose for his people to sing and praise Him. Again, this psalm is a modified Zion song because unlike other traditional Zion songs which "declare the good fortune of the people associated with Zion," (Goldingay 2006:602) or which "Yahweh's victory over foreign enemies at Jerusalem" (Allen 2002:303), it "has to redirect that declaration" by pouring out curses against Babylon (Goldingay 2006:602). Contrarily, the psalm is replete with sorrow, agony, fear, and curse.

3.6.4.4 Remembering Jerusalem and remembering against Edom

The word, "remember" occurs three times (vv. 1, 6, 7) and the word, "forget" occurs two times (v. 6) [in verse 6, the word, "forget" is used not to forget Jerusalem, in other words, to remember Jerusalem]. Psalm 137 is about remembering: remembering Zion or remembering against Edom, her enemy. However, the word, "remember" is used with the preposition "against" when it refers to Edom, one of Judah's enemies.

As previously discussed, if the verb "remember" is followed by the preposition, "against", it indicates God's judgment. After he remembered Jerusalem in a foreign land, the psalmist asks God to remember against Edom in order that God may judge them. With the expression,

"remember against", what can be expected from this psalm is that God will eventually judge the enemies. God's judgment is what the psalmist is asking God for through his imprecatory prayer ("remember against!").

3.6.4.5 Imprecation against Babylon

Psalm 137:8-9 contain the themes of retribution[110] (v. 8) and the harshest imprecation – killing babies (v. 9). The psalmist speaks the curse in two beatitudes: blessed are those who repay and blessed are those who dash the little children against rock. The imprecation uttered by the psalmist is the act of retribution that the psalmist wishes that Babylon would experience in the same way he and his fellow Judean people already experienced. Thus, the theme of imprecation (v. 9) is closely related to the theme of retribution (v. 8).

As previously seen, dashing the babies, which is a recurring theme in the Old Testament, was an ancient practice during wartime (Is 13; Jr 51; 2 Ki 8; Hs 10; Nah 3). The reason for killing babies was "total extermination" so that no nation being judged should rise up again in the future (see page 85 of this chapter). Because the image of babies being dashed takes place in a war context, retribution is not personal "bloodthirsty revenge" but "the principle of divine justice" (Day 2005:66).

Reading the psalm canonically in the Old Testament, first in the Psalms and then the rest of the Old Testament, will show that the psalmist's wishing curse and judgment on Babylon is legitimized by other passages of the Old Testament canon. After reading Psalm 137, first, within the whole (nearer and broader) context of the *Psalter* in the next chapter, chapter five will look at texts that are intertextually connected to the rest of Old Testament canon especially in terms of the theme imprecation in order to read Psalm 137 in the canonical context of the OT. Out of the many passages containing curses/imprecations, passages that specifically contain the imprecatory expression, "the infants will be dashed/killed" are selected for further discussion.

[110] This principle, also known as "*lex talionis* (a law of equal and direct retribution)," is found in the Pentateuch: Ex 21:22-25; Lv 24:17-22; Dt 19:16-21 (Day 2005:66-67).

Thus, this study will focus specifically on verse 9, "dashing your little ones against the rock" because as we will eventually see, parallel passages that contain the expression, "dashing the enemies' little ones" are found in contexts of judgment announced against Babylon (and other nations) and where the message of hope/restoration for exiled Judah is also announced. This expression is found in the setting of Babylon being judged. Thus, specifically dealing with the expression, "dashing the enemies' little ones" will be sufficient in our understanding the imprecatory prayer in Psalm 137.

The passages that contain the image of babies being dashed or killed are found in the following passages: Deuteronomy 32; 2 Kings 8; Isaiah 13; Jeremiah 51; Hosea 10; Nahum 3. Each passage will be dealt with in terms of themes and contexts so that we can interpret what these passages say about the psalmist's imprecation in Psalm 137. As we will eventually see, all the curses of the death of the infants take place mostly during war as punishment from God in these passages. The objects of the curses of these harshest punishments can include all nations: God's people and the enemies of God and of His people.

Thus, the next chapter will display the imprecation of Psalm 137 in the entire context of the *Psalter* in order to hear what the *Psalter* in its final, canonical shape says of the imprecation and find out what the psalmist's intent of speaking such a imprecation would be. Afterward, chapter five will read the imprecation of Psalm 137 in light of other passages that have the almost identical expression or theme of imprecation as Psalm 137 – dashing the infants. In order to implement this task, this study will pay attention to each passage of imprecation by dealing with theological themes and the analysis of nearer and broader contexts of the passages in which the imprecation involving the death of the infants occur.

Chapter 4
PSALM 137 IN THE CANONICAL CONTEXT OF THE PSALTER

4.1 Introduction

This chapter attempts to interpret the "imprecation" theme or Imprecatory Prayer of Psalm 137 by reading the Psalm in the entire context of the *Psalter* (Book I – Book V). It considers the Psalm first in Book V, its nearer context in the *Psalter*, and then in Book I – Book IV, its broader context. This chapter seeks to identify the basis (the messages of judgment against Babylon) of the psalmist's imprecation in the literary context of the *Psalter*. Besides the "imprecation" and "judgment" themes, this chapter also pays close attention to the "restoration" theme of Judah of Psalm 137 in the context of the *Psalter*.

4.2 Psalm 137 in the nearer context

4.2.1 Imprecation in the context of Psalms 135-138

At first glance, because Psalm 137 comprises of lament and imprecation, the psalm does not seem to fit in its neighboring psalms. For this reason, Schaefer argues that this psalm has "no link with the psalms which precede and follow it" because "linguistically, the mournful, imprecatory tone and the theme set it apart from its context" (Schaefer 2001:321). Moreover, Schaefer argues that rather Psalms 136 and 138 have connection with each other (because of the phrase "steadfast love … endures forever"), while Psalm 137, being sandwiched between the two, has no connection to the neighboring "thanksgiving" psalms (Schaefer 2001:323).

However, analyzing Psalm 137 and its neighboring psalms will demonstrate a strong link between them. Among the scholars who have attempted to prove that there are connections between Psalm 137 and its neighboring psalms, the analysis of Zenger (2005) in his commentary on Psalms for the links between the psalms is helpful. The first analysis Zenger conducts is a

verbal connection. The word "זכר" appears in both Psalm 137 and Psalms 135-136 (Zenger 2005:520). In Psalm 137, this word occurs three times. The first two occurrences are the exiled people's remembering Zion/Jerusalem (v. 1 and v. 6). And the last occurrence is that God should remember the Edomites (v. 7). The occurrences, especially the imperative "זכר" in v. 7 "obtains a deeper dimension from Psalm 135-136" because the imperative, "remember" is made to "the specific Godhead of YHWH, which was revealed in the canonical history of Israel's origins" (Zenger 2005:521). Likewise, Holladay explains that Psalm 135:13 and 136:23, which allude the exodus motif (from the Song of Moses) in Exodus 3:15 and Deuteronomy 32:36 with the noun form of "זכר", whose function is "solemn naming or address of God" (Holladay 1988:89), indicates that God himself preserves Israel's "origin and its collective identity from generation to generation (Zenger 2005:521). God who remembered Israel who suffered in the land of Egypt and delivered her out of the land of Egypt (Pss 135, 136) is the same God who will remember Israel's enemies and eventually punish them (Ps 137).

The second analysis is the motif of Israel's enemies struck down (Zenger 2005:521). Verses 7-9 of Psalm 137 depict the exiled people's curse on their enemies, that they should be struck down by God. This motif appears in Psalms 135 and 136[111] in that "YHWH proves his Godhead to Israel in direct confrontation with the nations that are Israel's enemies" (Zenger 2005:521). Similarly, Goldingay explains that whenever Israel encounters enemies in biblical history, it is not God but Israel that "defeats, slays, and devotes (as commissioned by YHWH, of course)" (Goldingay 2006:582). In Psalms 135 and 136 the kings of foreign nations – Egypt, the Amorites, Bashan, and all the kingdoms of Canaan – are defeated. These psalms are reflections of the battle account of Sihon and Og found in Deuteronomy 3-4, according to which YHWH defeated and drove them out from before Israel and gave their land to her (Goldingay 2006:582). The concept of killing the enemies of God and/or Israel that begins in the Pentateuch continues throughout the Old Testament.

The third analysis is the reference to Zion/Jerusalem (Zenger 2005:521). Reference to Zion and/or Jerusalem in Psalm 135:21 is significant in understanding the imprecation in Psalm 137.

[111] Pss 135 and 136 (Songs of Ascents or YHWH's songs) "present YHWH's omnipotence through the motif of the "Striking down" of Israel's enemies" and "characterize it as creating justice and also as a proof of love for weak and helpless Israel" (Zenger 2005:522).

We have seen that Psalms 135-136 present the accounts of the Exodus and the defeat of Israel's enemies. Psalm 135 (especially vv. 1-3), beginning with the imperative hallelu (הללו) (four times), is a continuation of Psalm 134, which uses "the hymnic exhortation "ברכו" (Zenger 2005:521). Similarly, Futato explains that Psalm 135 is the answer to "the call to praise the Lord that was issued in Psalm 134" (Futato 2009:403). The people are called to bless God (Ps 134) and praise God who is in Zion (Ps 135) because it is God who struck down Israel's enemies (Ps 135) (DeClaissé-Walford 2014:939).

Moreover, the blessing is "a two way relationship" (Allen 2002:283) because God is now called to bless the people from Zion (DeClaissé-Walford 2014:941). And Psalm 136 is "a sequel to" Psalm 135 because the psalmist keeps praising God's goodness (135:3; 136:1) by mentioning how God defeated Israel's enemies (Futato 2009:406). Thus, the blessing of the people toward God in Zion goes forth from Zion to them. In this "two way relationship," Psalm 137 has "an additional function"; it is the "dialectic of suffering and joy", that is, "the dialectic of YHWH's apparent impotence in the face of enemies threatening Zion and YHWH's omnipotence" (Zenger 2005:521). This kind of dialectic arises because God who is omnipotent in every sense – the Creator (Gn), the Deliverer (Ex), and the Granter of the land of Canaan to Israel (Jos 21:43) as sung in Psalms 135-136 – appears impotent because of the fall of Zion/Jerusalem as described in Psalm 137.

The fourth analysis is "a compositional sense-space" with the neighboring psalms (Zenger 2005:521). Psalm 137 contrasts with the neighboring psalms with "an intense counterimage" (Zenger 2005:521). In Psalm 137 the exiled people are forced to sing a song of Zion by their tormenters, while in Psalm 138, the poet (David) (v. 1) and "all the kings of the earth" (v. 4) praise and give thanks to God (Zenger 2005:521). However, Psalm 138 is a continuation of Psalm 136 in terms of God's "loving-kindness" and "faithfulness" (Ps 138:2). The reason Psalm 137 is sandwiched between Songs of Ascents (following Ps 136) and the final davidic psalms (preceding Ps 138) is that Psalm 137 "sets up the exilic stage for the fifth davidic *Psalter*" (Zenger 2005:522).

Thus, because of the above-discussed four analyses that Zenger and other scholars have made, Psalm 137 and Psalms 135-138 have a strong connection with one another. Walter Brueggemann uncovers the links between Psalm 137 and its neighboring psalms. Brueggemann develops and categorizes the *Psalter* into three experiences that the psalmists face throughout the psalms: "orientation (songs of guaranteed creation), disorientation (songs of disarray) and re-orientation (songs of surprising new life)" (Brueggemann 1984:21). According to these terms, Psalm 137 is a psalm of disorientation sandwiched by psalms of new orientation (Pss 136 and 138). A song of disorientation like Psalm 137 is characterized by "the most regressive" language, that is, the imprecation that the psalmist "will not be satisfied until God works retaliation on those who have done the wrong" (Brueggemann 1984:21).

There is a movement from this song of disorientation to songs of new orientation. The "most obvious song" of new orientation is the thanksgiving song (e.g., Pss 18, 21, 30, 34, 92, 116, 118, 138) (Brueggemann 1984:125). What happens between psalms of disorientation and of new orientation is that the psalmist "has complained to God and God has acted in response to the lament. The result of God's intervention is that the old issue has been overcome" (Brueggemann 1984:126). Thus the neighboring psalms are the result of what God has done for the psalmist of disorientation. Brueggemann correctly mentions that Psalms of Lament and Psalms of Thanksgiving are closely related because "both motifs may occur in the same psalm" like Psalms 9, 4, 107 and 116 (Brueggemann 1984:126, 197).

In sum, reading Psalms 135-138 together renders a number of thematic developments that refute the argument that Psalm 137 and its neighboring Psalms are not related one another and that go beyond the juxtaposition of similar words. Reading them together renders a movement that begins with praise (Ps 135) and thanksgiving (Ps 136) to lament/imprecation (Ps 137) back to thanksgiving (Ps 138). As we have seen, with Brueggemann, it is from new orientation to disorientation and back to new orientation. Psalms 135 and 136, known as "twin psalms" (Zenger 2005:493), show reasons (with כי clauses) for praising and giving thanksgiving to God (135:4, 14; 136). The reason they are called "twin psalms" is that they "have as their theme the canonical 'history of Israel's origins' from the exodus to the occupation of the land" (Zenger 2005:493). What needs to be noted is that for the things that God has wondrously done for Israel

are the reason for Israel's praising and thanksgiving in Psalm 135: for (כי clause - reason) God has chosen Israel (v. 4); for (כי clause) God is great and above all gods (v. 5); for (כי clause) God will vindicate his people and have compassion on his servants (v. 14). However, in Psalm 136, God's חסד (loving-kindness) is the reason (כי clause) God did great wonders in order to save his people Israel from her enemies and again his חסד is the reason the psalmist gives thanks to God.

This reading has some important implications for the reciprocally interpretive influence between Psalm 137 and its immediate neighboring psalms. Placed at the center of the psalms, even though the psalmist and the deported people are lamenting in a foreign land, they have confidence and expect God to intervene on their behalf because of a "saving God who makes grand promises" and who acts according to those promises (Zenger 2005:522).

The Imprecatory Prayer (Ps 137:7-9) that the psalmist speaks out to God is, "remember the day of Jerusalem against the Edomites!" (v. 7). The day of Jerusalem is "the evil day when Jerusalem was destroyed" (Zenger 2005:518). The Edomites' taunting words show how severe the destruction of Jerusalem was, "Lay bare! Lay bare! Down to its foundation (יוסד)! (v. 7). The word 'foundation' from the verb form יסד, implying "the actual foundations of the walls of Jerusalem", means "the God-established order (*yāsad*) in creation, in His rule, and His election of a people as his own" (VanGemeren 2005:952). Schoville explains,

> Earthly Jerusalem was particularly favored by God; in a time of crisis he laid in Zion a precious, tested cornerstone as sure foundation (Isa 28:16). The justice and righteousness inherent in this stone were the standards by which the inhabitants of the city would be tested, and those who trusted in this stone did not need to fear (Schoville 1997:475).

The psalmist's "being mindful" of Jerusalem in Psalm 137 is also expressed in its neighboring psalms, "Blessed be the LORD from Zion, He who dwells in Jerusalem! Praise the LORD!" (135:21). Zion/Jerusalem is the place God chose for his dwelling place in which He is praised and blessed by His people Israel, and moreover, it is where He bless them. Psalms 134-136, part of the Songs of Ascents, were sung by worshippers as they ascended towards Jerusalem.

Certainly, Psalm 137 reminds the reader that according to the Imprecatory Prayer, God is expected to reverse the fate of the enemies by punishing them and in order to restore God's

deported people. When read in connection with its neighboring psalms, the Imprecatory Prayer in Psalm 137 makes sense as an image of "God who strikes"[112] the enemies depicted in "the canonical history of Israel's origins (from the exodus to the occupation of the land)" (Zenger 2005:493). Even though the exiled Judah is lamenting in a foreign land of the enemies, they have faith that God will indeed restore them by punishing the enemies. God who is depicted as the divine warrior who has fought on behalf of Israel against their enemies in Psalms 135-6, is expected to be their "divine warrior as future deliverer of Israel" if their Imprecatory Prayer (vv. 7-9) is granted (Ryken et al. 1998:212). Revenge[113] is the way which God delivers his people because revenge of enemies means restoration and deliverance of Israel (Peels 2003:98).

4.2.2 Imprecation in the context of Psalms 120-145

Each of Psalms 135-136 and 138 introduces a series of praise/thanksgiving that contains the theme of redemption by means of striking down the enemies respectively.[114] Even though they are categorized as Thanksgiving Psalms or Songs of Ascents, the psalms contain the image of God's judgment against the enemies which is uttered and eagerly sought by the psalmist in Psalm 137:7-9; the imprecations of vv. 7-9 are the image shown in Psalms 135-136 and 138 – destruction of the enemies and restoration and praise/thanksgiving of the exiled people.

Preceding Psalms 135-138, Psalms 120-134 are Songs of Ascents according to the superscriptions (שיר המעלות). Psalms 138-145 are the "final collection of Davidic psalms", consisting of a Wisdom Psalm (Ps 139), a Royal Psalm (Ps 145), and Lament Psalms (Pss 140-144) (VanGemeren 2005:955). If Psalm 137 is read in connection with the Songs of Ascents (Pss 120-134) and the last collection of the Davidic psalms (Pss 138-145), the theme of God's judgment against God's and Israel's enemies by means of imprecation in laments becomes part

[112] This image of God is also known as "divine warrior", whereby God is "the one who wins victories for Israel. They defeat the enemy, not because of their own strength or superior intelligence but because God has fought for them" (Longman 1988:212).
[113] Regarding the curses uttered by the psalmist, H.G.L. Peels explains, "The psalmist's main point is that the Lord is God and that there is no other, that he reigns and that justice is safe in his hands, and that the words of his covenant are true. Frequently God is called King, Judge, Warrior. People can long for this sort of revenge, they can rejoice at it, because it means resotration of justice, deliverance and a future" (Peels 2003:98).
[114] For a structural compositional outline of Pss 135-138, see (VanGemeren 2008:794).

of the same meta-narrative as do the various other themes of Psalms 120-134 and Psalms 138-145.

Psalms 120-134 are closely related to Psalm 137 because of the "frequent references to Jerusalem and Zion (Pss 122:3, 6; 125:1, 126:1; 128:5; 129:5; 132:13; 133:3; 134:3)" (DeClaissé-Walford 2014:887)[115]. The Songs of Ascents contain "the wide variety of Psalm types" – "individual and Community Laments (Pss 120, 123, 126, 130), Individual and Community hymns (Pss 121, 122, 124, 125, 129, 131, 134, 135, 1336), Wisdom Psalms (Pss 127, 128, 133) and a Royal Psalm (132) (DeClaissé-Walford 2014:890). The first Song of Ascent begins with the psalmist's answered prayer in distress (120:1). The second Song of Ascent (Ps 121) communicates that Israel's help is from God, the Creator of heaven and earth. The third song, sung by David (Ps 122), has the theme of passionate love for Jerusalem, "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem; "May they prosper who love you" (v. 6, NASB). This song is reminiscent of Psalm 137 since both Psalms 122 and 137 deal with the passionate love for Jerusalem. In Psalm 137, the psalmist proclaims a curse on himself if he does not remember Jerusalem because of his heartfelt devotion to it (vv. 5-6).

The psalmist of Psalm 124 praises God for His deliverance from enemies, saying, "Blessed be the LORD, who has not given us to be torn by their teeth" (v. 6, NASB). Then Psalm 125 speaks of the inviolability of Zion that has previously been discussed: "Those who trust in the LORD are as Mount Zion, which cannot be moved but abides forever" (v. 1). The psalmist of Psalm 129 (the tenth Song of Ascent) speaks an imprecation against those who are against Zion, "May all who hate Zion be put to shame and turned backward. Let them be like grass upon the housetops, which withers before it grows up" (vv. 5-6). For this reason, Kidner calls Psalm 129 "persecuted Zion" (Kidner 2008:480). Even though it is almost impossible to date this psalm, what can be known is that from vv. 1-2, this psalm "looks back over the history of Israel" (Kraus 1993:461). Plausibly in a post-exilic time, God's people "survey its path – a way of suffering and hostilities"

[115] About the Songs of Ascents, DeClaissé-Walford explains, "The verbal root of "ascents" is *'ālâ* ("go up"). Since Jerusalem sits on a hill, no matter where one comes from, one always "goes up" to Jerusalem. Pilgrims on their way to Jerusalem may have sung the Songs of Ascents, which, except for Ps 132, are brief and thus easy to memorize. Although these fifteen Pss most likely come from a variety of times and places in ancient Israel, the message of the collection as a whole is that Jerusalem is the place for the coming together of the people of God for celebrations and commemorations and for acknowledging the goodness and help of the God of the Israelites" (DeClaissé-Walford 2014:887).

(Kraus 1993:461). The imprecation in this psalm, according to DeClaissé-Walford, means, "God is righteous and will care for the faithful" and "the oppressors will not prevail (v. 2)" (DeClaissé-Walford 2014:925). Certainly this can be a message of hope for the deported people who cursed their enemies in Psalm 137.

Palms 138-145, the last collection of Davidic Psalms, are closely related to Psalm 137 for a number of reasons. The structure of Psalms 138-145 needs to be discussed in order to read Psalm 137 in connection with the last collection. The Psalms 138 and 145 function as a "framework of praise," Psalm 139 as a Wisdom Psalm and Psalms 140-144 as Lament Psalms (VanGemeren 2005:955). Among these psalms, Psalm 139 is known as an Imprecatory Psalm. Reading Psalm 137 in connection with Psalm 139:19-24 produces textual and canonical meaning for the scene described in Psalm 137:7-9. In the context of Psalm 137, the psalmist prays in verses 7-9 that God would remember against the Edomites for their wrongdoing and that God would destroy the Babylonians – even their little children. The psalmist in Psalm 139:19-24 prays that God would kill the wicked – his enemies. Moreover, David the psalmist declares that his own enemies are God's enemies as well; "Do I not hate those who hate you, O LORD? (v. 21)," and "They have become my enemies (v. 22)." Like David in Psalm 139 had a conviction that God would punish the wicked, the psalmist in Psalm 137 has a conviction that God would punish his enemies and "called for divine action" because his enemies are God's enemies (Miller 1986:151).

Psalm 139:23-24 known as a Wisdom Psalm, needs to be paid attention to as they show two contrasting ways: the way of pain (דרך-עצב) and the way of God (דרך עולם). The former leads to destruction and the latter to eternal life with God (VanGemeren 2005:964). The Hebrew phrase, דרך-עצב which can be translated as either 'wicked way' (NKJV), 'way of offensive' (NIV), 'hurtful way' (NASB), 'grievous way' (ESV), or 'way of the pain of exile' (BDB) indicates the way of pain in which the psalmist (Ps 139), should avoid, and from which the palmist (and the all departed people) (Ps 137) tries to move towards the way of God.

Psalms 144 and 145 function as a Lament Psalm and a praise psalm respectively. However, each of the psalms has a wisdom theme in the way that their concluding remarks are similar to those of Psalms 1 (Wisdom Psalm) and 2 (Royal Psalm). Psalm 144 ends: "Blessed are the people to

whom such blessings fall! Blessed are the people whose God is the LORD!" (v. 15, ESV). And Psalm 145 ends: "The LORD preserves all who love him, but all the wicked he will destroy. My mouth will speak the praise of the LORD, and let all flesh bless his holy name forever and ever!" (vv. 20-21, ESV). Similarly, this is how Psalms 1-2 conclude, that is, concluding in a contrasting way: "For the LORD knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish" (1:6), and "Kiss the Son lest He be angry, and you perish in the way, for His wrath may soon be kindled. Blessed are all who take refuge in Him!" (2:12).

In Psalm 137 the deported people cry out to God for their restoration by God's punishing their enemies. Their prayer is that God would judge their ememy nations that once mocked and destroyed Israel (Kraus 1992:67). Likewise, in the last collection of Davidic Psalms, David prays to God that God would restore him to God's way and keep him in it by punishing his enemies. God's punishing his enemies and His restoring his people are two sides of the same coin. Concerning this, VanGemeren says, "The Imprecatory Psalms focus on the reality of evil and the hope of restoration" (VanGemeren 2005:954). Thus, evil is not the final word, but there is hope of restoration beyond evil. We now turn to read Psalm 137 in the context of the entire *Psalter*.

4.3 Psalm 137 in the broader context

4.3.1 Psalm 137 in the five books of the *Psalter*

Having dealt with the relation between Psalm 137 and its near context (Pss 120-145), we now turn our discussion to see how Psalm 137 is related with the rest of the *Psalter*: from Book I to Book V.[116] It has previously been seen (chapter 1) that Wilson's influence was great on discussing the shape of the *Psalter* and that many scholars are under his influence. Dealing with the seams (the first and the last palms) of the five Books of the *Psalter*, Wilson mostly deals with the last psalms (Pss 41, 72, 89, 106, 150) of each Book to "discover the editorial purpose behind the *Psalter* arrangement" (Wilson 1985:209). However, because Wilson's dealing with the last psalms is not thorough enough, besides looking at the last psalms of the five Books, this study also deals with the first psalms (Pss 3, 42, 73, 90, 107) of each Book and some Imprecatory

[116] The "fivefold division" of the *Psalter* is believed to be based on the Midrash on the Pss (9th century AD), which is featured by the "concluding doxologies" at the end of each Book (Bullock 2001:58).

Psalms as well.[117] By investigating the psalms, this section examines what makes each of the five Books distinct from one another, how each Book unfolds the 'imprecation' theme, and what the final shape of the *Psalter* says about the imprecation of Psalm 137:9.

4.3.1.1 Imprecation in Book I

An issue arises regarding whether Psalm 1 only or both Psalms 1-2[118] should be considered as an introduction to the whole *Psalter*. Wilson identifies only Psalm 1 as the introduction[119] to the whole *Psalter* because, Psalm 1, being separated from Psalm 2, is a Wisdom Psalm teaching the two ways of life; the way of the righteous and the way of the wicked in the psalm puts an emphasis on the Torah[120] of God and the emphasis of two ways of life make this psalm as an introduction to the whole *Psalter* (Wilson 1985:204-207). Likewise, Patrick Miller explains that in the *Psalter*, there are many references to both the righteous and the wicked dominantly in the Book I and less frequently in the rest of the *Psalter* (Miller 1994:85). Miller agrees with Wilson and says that even though there are "undeniable connections" between Psalm 1 and Psalm 2, each should be regarded as a "separate and distinct" psalm (Miller 1994:84-85). Miller says that it is plausible that Psalm 2 was the first psalm of the *Psalter* and Psalm 1 was later added to the *Psalter* as an introduction to it (Miller 1994:85).

Wilson argues that Psalm 2 introduces Book I (and the whole *Psalter*) because of its relation with Psalm 41, the last chapter of Book I (Wilson 1985:210). In Psalm 2, which speaks of God's protection of Israel from her enemies, the worldly kings are "echoed" in the last chapter of Book I, Psalm 41, "YHWH delivers… protects… you do not give up to the will of his enemies… (vv. 1-2)" and "my enemy has not triumphed over me" (vv. 11-12) (Wilson 1985:209-210). Because

[117] According to Bullock, out of seven Imprecatory Pss 35, 69 and 109 are "the most intense" (Bullock 2001:228).
[118] Concerning the argument of whether Ps 1 or Pss 1-2 should be considered as an introduction to the whole *Psalter*, Whybray says, "there has been no consensus" and "no agreement has been reached" (Whybray 1996:31, 33).
[119] In the final shape of the *Psalter*, Marvin Tate says that Ps 1 is a "didactic poem" that "does not in the first instance have a cultic or social setting; its primary setting is literary, for it forms an introduction to the *Psalter* as a whole and has been placed in its present position by the editor or compiler of the *Psalter* for that purpose" (Craigie & Tate 2004:59).
[120] Likewise, Anton Arens regards editorial work throughout the *Psalter* and understands that Psalm1 functions as a Torah psalm for the whole *Psalter* saying, "Der Ps ist als Vorspruch der Thoralesung hierher gekommen, hat er auch die Funktion des Eröffnungsliedes in der Sammlung des *Psalters* ubernommen. Darum die starke Betonung der Thora" (Arens 1968:170).

the theme of davidic covenant[121] that pervades Book I begins from Psalm 2, Wilson argues that Psalms 2-41 should be considered as "an independent unit" (Wilson 1985:210). Likewise, following Wilson, McCann argues that the psalmists' relation with God in Psalms 2 and 41 show that Book I begins at Psalm 2 because the king who is God's begotten son in Psalm 2 is protected by God in Psalm 41 (McCann 1993:94).

However, many scholars disagree with Wilson[122] and understand both Psalms 1 and 2[123] as an introduction (Brennan 1976:126-158; Collins 1987:41-60; DeClaissé-Walford 2014:65; Goldingday 2006:94; Howard 1989:274-285; Longman 2014:55; McCann 1993:52-70; O'Brien 1987:281-98; Craigie & Tate 2004:59; Whybray 1996:11-124). Among these scholars, Bullock provides various reasons for Psalms 1-2 as an introduction to the whole *Psalter*. The first reason is that the *chiastic* structure of Psalms 1-2 (1:1, 2:12) that begins and ends with the phrase, "blessed (*ashrei*)" *makes* both psalms one unit (Bullock 2001:59): "Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked" (1:1ab) and "Blessed are all who take refuge in him" (2:12e). The *chiasm* makes a distinction between the way of the righteous and the way of the wicked. The second reason is that the text of Psalms 1 and 2 testifies that they are one unit; the word, הגה (to meditate; to conspire) is used in both Psalms (1:2; 2:1) (Bullock 2001:60). The third reason is the idea that the wicked will perish in Psalm 1:6 reappears in Psalm 2:11-12, "Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the son, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way" (Bullock 2001:60). The last reason is that the contrastive description between the righteous and the wicked that begins in Psalm 1:1 is "completed with climatic finality in Psalm 2" (Bullock 2001:60).

Agreeing with Bullock, Marvin Tate, based on early Jewish and Christian traditions, sees both Psalms 1 and 2 as an introduction to the *Psalter* as well (Craigie & Tate 2004:59). As for the evidence from the Jewish tradition, Craigie and Tate refer to the work of Rabbi Johanan in the Babylonian Talmud, saying, "Every Chapter that was particularly dear to David he commenced

[121] Likewise, Wilson maintains that Ps 2 introduces the davidic covenant because the psalm is parallel to 2 Sm 7:14 (Wilson 1985:209).
[122] Wilson recognizes some recurring words and phrases in both Pss 1 and 2, but he argues that the psalms should not "be interpreted together as one psalm" (Wilson 1985:205). Wilson asserts that Ps 2 "introduces the idea of the davidic covenant" that permeates in Book I, which is "a very davidic group of Pss" (Wilson 1985:210).
[123] As for the placement of Pss 1-2 as an introduction, Longman explains, "Its placement is intentional on the part of the editors responsible for the final form of the book" (Longman 2014:55).

with 'Happy' and terminated with 'Happy,' as it is written, '*Happy* is the man,' and he terminated with 'Happy,' as it is written, '*Happy are all they that take refuge in him*' (Ber. 9b)" (Craigie & Tate 2004:59). As for the evidence from the Christian tradition, likewise, Craigie & Tate refer to some manuscripts of Acts 13:33 ("as also it is written in the First Psalm, "You are my son, today I have begotten you") of the New Testament in which Luke, the writer of Acts, quotes from Psalm 2:7 ("I will tell of the decree: The LORD said to me, 'You are my son; today I have begotten you", ESV) and "introduces it as coming from the first psalm" (Craigie & Tate 2004:59-60).

Because arguing for Psalms 1-2 as one unit and an introduction to the whole *Psalter* is more persuasive, this study follows the majority of scholars on this issue. Certainly, Wilson's argument that there is a connection between Psalm 2 and 41 is valid as far as davidic covenant is mentioned. However, by regarding Psalms 1-2 as an introduction and Psalm 3 as the first psalm of Book I, the idea of the davidic covenant in Book I can still be emphasized. Just like Wilson's argument that Psalm 2 and Psalm 41 should be regarded as one unit because of the idea of davidic covenant, the argument that Psalm 3 and Psalm 41 should be regarded as one unit is valid as well. For these reasons, DeClaissé-Walford regards Psalm 1 (wisdom) and Psalm 2 (royal) as an introduction "provide the lenses through readers are instructed to approach the *Psalter*" and Psalms 3-9 (Pss of 'David') "commemorate the reign of the great king of ancient Israel" (DeClaissé-Walford 2004:59).

Just as Psalm 1 serves as an introduction to the whole *Psalter*, so does Psalm 2. Psalm 1, a wisdom psalm whose focus is "Torah obedience", warns "those who are wicked" (Longman 2014:55); Psalm 2, a Royal Psalm,[124] whose focus is "kingship", depicts the power of God and his anointed "over against the plotting of the earth's powerful leaders" (Longman 2014:59). Indeed, obeying Torah (Ps 1) and destruction/judgment announced to the wicked who are against God and his anointed (Ps 2)[125] are the themes that permeate the *Psalter*. It is worth noting that in

[124] DeClaissé-Walford defines the *genre* of Ps 2 as a Royal Psalm because "it was most likely performed as part of the coronation ceremony of a new king in Jerusalem." However, DeClaissé-Walford argues that Royal Pss like Ps 2 are "not defined by their shared form but by the fact that they all deal with the davidic kings (Pss 18, 20, 21, 45, 72, 89, 101, 110, 132, and 144)" (DeClaissé-Walford 2014:65).

[125] Goldingay says that as "Ps 1 would be at home in Pr, so Ps 2 would be at home in a prophetic book" (Goldingay 2006:94).

Book I, the *genres* that appear most frequently are Individual Laments[126] while there are other *genres* that appear less frequently such as creation (Pss 8, 19), royal (Ps 18, 20-21), Community Hymn (Pss 24, 29, 33), and wisdom (32, 37). Some psalms of Individual Lament in Book I contain imprecations (Pss 5, 10, 17, 35). In his Lamenting Prayers, while the psalmist prays to God who is in Zion, His temple ("in his holy hill" in 3:4; "your house" in 5:7) for deliverance from his enemies (Pss 3, 5, 7), he speaks curses against them (Pss 3:7; 5:10; 7:14-16) (Stuart 2002:134). David's enemies are his son Absalom (3:1) and the unidentified (the boastful one in 5:5; the pursuer in 7:1). After his Lamenting Psalms,[127] the psalmist confesses that his prayer was answered and he was saved from his enemies, "I call upon the Lord, who is worthy to be praised, and I am saved from my enemies. In my distress I called upon the Lord; to my God I cried for help. From his temple he heard my voice, and my cry to him reached his ears" (18:3, 6, ESV).

The headings[128] of the Imprecatory Psalms in Book I (Pss 5, 9-10, 17, 35) indicate they are Psalms (Individual Laments) of David (מזמור לדוד). The Psalmist in Book I utters an imprecation against his (personal) enemies hoping that God would punish them so that he might be delivered. Importantly, the psalmist confesses that his prayer is answered. The imprecation of Psalm 137 can be considered in this light. The psalmist of Psalm 137 prays the prayer of imprecation the psalmist of Book I prays – that God might God judge his enemies so that he might be delivered.

4.3.1.2 Imprecation in Book II

Book II begins with psalms of the sons of Korah (Pss 42-44) and a Royal Psalm (Ps 45). Psalm 42, the first psalm of the Korah collections (Pss 42-49 in Book II; Pss 84-85, 87-88 in Book III) is about the "personal expression of someone who is in trouble but who is able at the same time to maintain hope" (McCann 1993:101). Even though Book II probably dates to the early

[126] For the *genres* that appear throughout Book I of the *Psalter*, see (DeClaissé-Walford 2004:59-61).
[127] In Book I, the reason for his lament is his enemies' mocking and attack without just cause. However, there is another reason for David's lament: his sin (Ps 1) (Stuart 2002:137). In order to get rid of his sins, David asks God for His mercy and forgiveness. Just as he trusts God when asking God for deliverance from the enemies, David also trusts Him to forgive his sins.
[128] According to Klaus Seybold, the most common headings of the *Psalter* are "*mizmôr* (song with background music), *šîr* (cultic song) and *máskîl* (aesthetic or diadactic poem)." For more discussion on headings, see (Seybold 1990:110).

monarchy of king David, Psalm 44, a lament psalm, "anticipates Book III[129] by mourning over a national defeat of considerable proportion" (Stuart 2002:137). In Psalm 45, a Royal Psalm, through the song of the sons of Korah, it can be seen how David's kingdom is closely related to God's throne: "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever. The scepter of your kingdom is a scepter of uprightness; you have loved righteousness and hated wickedness. Therefore God, your God, has anointed you (45:6-7, ESV)."

It is worth noting that some of the Korahites' psalms are Zion Psalms (Pss 46-48). Synonymous names for Zion that appear in the Psalms are "the city of God (46:4)," "the holy habitation (46:4)", "his holy throne (47:8)", "holy mountain (48:1)", "citadels (48:3)."[130] With the tragedy of Jerusalem's destruction and exile adumbrated in Psalm 44, Zion is the place the exiled people (Ps 137) remember and mourn over in the foreign land (Stuart 2002:137).

Davidic Psalms (Pss 51-71) appear after the Korah collections and most of them are David's personal individual laments. Just as in Book I, David's personal Individual Laments involve cursing his enemies in Book II (Pss 55, 58, 59, 69, 70). His enemies are Saul (54:1, 57:1, 59:1) and the Philistines (56:1), the rulers of the world (58:1, NIV). Just like in Book I, in Book II while praying to God, David curses his enemies and seeks help from God who is in Jerusalem, His holy place (Pss 54-59).

Wilson maintains that Psalm 72 (a Ps of 'Solomon'), the last psalm of Book II, consists of three petitions: "1) May he rule justly (vv. 1-2, 4); 2) may his dominion be secure from his enemies (vv. 8-11); 3) may he live long and be blessed (vv. 5, 15, 17)" (Wilson 1985:210-211). The Davidic covenant (David will be secured!) that begins in Psalm 2 and continued by Psalm 41 is passed on to Solomon's prayer in Psalm 72 (Wilson 1985:211). Likewise, DeClaissé-Walford

[129] Arnold and Beyer mention that certain Korahites' Pss "reflect the time of the Babylonian exile or later (Pss 44, 85)", while others reflect the early monarchy of David (Arnold & Beyer 1998:304). Concerning these two aspects – pre-exilic and exilic – of the Korahite Pss, Bullock explains that these Pss "help Israel deal with the exile and dispersion that had devastated the nation and disoriented their faith" (Bullock 2001:63). Similarly, McCann asserts that Book II "reflects the experience of exile and dispersion" (McCann 1993:103).

[130] Stuart maintains that all the names for Zion are closely related to God because Zion, the temple in Jerusalem is representation of God's presence (Stuart 2002:137).

maintains that Psalm 72 is "first and foremost, a royal psalm"[131] that is "concerned with the human king of Israel" (DeClaissé-Walford 2014:573). The superscription, "לשלמה (of Solomon)" and the last verse, "The prayers of David, the son of Jesse are completed" (v. 20) likely indicate that the editors "shaped the book of Psalms" "as the point of transition from one monarch to the next" (Bullock 2001:63; DeClaissé-Walford 2014:573). In Psalm 72, the covenant promises are passed "on from David to Solomon" (Longman 2014:34). In the Psalm, the king is called to bless all the nations (vv. 12-14), which is reminiscent of God's promise made to Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3 (DeClaissé-Walford 2014:573; Longman 2014:270).

As for the seams between Book II (Pss 42-72) and Book III (Pss 73-89), Bullock recognizes the difference between Psalm 72 and Psalm 73 (a psalm of Asaph) because each psalm represents different themes: "one idealizing Israel's king" (Ps 72) and "the injustice of the world" (Ps 73) (Bullock 2001:64). Book III reflects "events that took place during the period of the divided kingdoms" with the destructions of both northern and southern kingdoms; it ends with a lament due to the exile (DeClaissé-Walford 2004:85). Most psalms[132] of Book III are either exilic or post-exilic after Zion/Jerusalem was "laid waste," the temple was "descated" and the Davidic dynasty which was meant to be an "everlasting covenant" was "now without a king" (Stuart 2002:139).

The headings of the Imprecatory Psalms in Book II indicate that the Imprecatory Psalms (Pss 54, 55, 58, 59, 69, 70) are psalms 'of David' (משכיל לדוד; מכתם לדוד). In the Psalms, the psalmist prays a prayer of imprecation to God so that his personal enemies might be judged. Book II contains "curse," "judgment," and "lament" themes just as Psalm 137 does; only, the difference is that the enemy in Psalm 137 is the national enemy, Babylon. It can be seen that whether the enemy is personal or national, the psalmist curses him.

[131] DeClaissé-Walford argues "The royal psalms do not share a similar *genre*, but are united via their thematic content of being about human kings, presumably of the davidic line" (DeClaissé-Walford 2014:573).
[132] Some Pss of Book III are pre-exilic (Pss 76, 78, 83, 84, 87). However, Stuart suggests that these Pss should read and understood in light of Book III, whether exilic or post-exilic (Stuart 2002:139).

4.3.1.3 Imprecation in Book III

According to Wilson, in Psalm 89, the last psalm of Book III, the davidic covenant is made explicit (vv. 3-4, 20-21, 28) in four ways:

> 1) The covenant is viewed as established in the dim past (vv. 19-20, 49), 2) The ps is concerned with the extension of the covenant to the descendants of David (vv. 4, 29, 36), 3) The covenant is viewed as broken, failed (vv. 38-39, 44), 4). The hope expressed is that in his steadfast love YHWH will yet remember his covenant and uphold the descendants of David (vv. 1, 45-50) (Wilson 1985:212-213).

Thus, Book III is about the remaining hope for the descendants of David even though the covenant was failed, because, out of His steadfast love, God will remember his covenant and restore His people. But the problem is that the day that God will restore His people seems to be delayed and that is the reason the psalmist cries out, "How long, O LORD? Will you hide yourself forever?" (89:46a, ESV) (Wilson 1985:214).

However, David Howard speaks of it in a slightly different way. While Wilson understands the failure as the failure of the davidic covenant, Howard understands it as the failure[133] of God's people (Howard 1997:205). The reason why Howard sees it thus is because of his overemphasis on Royal Psalms, davidic covenant God initiated with David cannot fail and because David's kingdom coexists with God's kingdom "in complementary roles throughout the *Psalter*" (Howard 1997:201).

Longman argues against Wilson's idea of the failure of davidic covenant, suggesting that it is "debatable or doubtful that Psalm 89 ought to be read as an account of the end of the davidic dynasty" (Longman 2014:34). As Longman correctly points out, what can be certain is that even though it seems like God "turned his back on his promises to David", God will certainly respond to the lament of the psalmist in Psalm 89 in a way we do not know (Longman 2014:34). Moreover, Books IV and V focus both on "the human king" and "the divine King" (Longman 2014:34). Regardless of which interpretation is taken, Psalm 89 "clearly suggests the need for

[133] The idea that the "problem is Israel's failure, not the Lord's is found, for example, in Ps 89:8-9, "You have set out iniquities before you, our secret sins in the light of your presence. All our days pass away under your wrath; we finish our years with a moan" (vv. 8-9).

reorientation"[134] that moves beyond the failed davidic covenant (or "failure of God's people" or whichever it is) (McCann 1993:99).

The headings of the Imprecatory Psalms in Book III indicate that the Imprecatory Psalms (Pss 79, 83) are psalms "of Asaph" (מזמור לאסף). Whereas the enemies are personal in Books I and II, the psalmist's enemy in Book III is the national enemy who destroyed Jerusalem (Ps 79:1). The destruction of Jerusalem in Psalm 79 and the attack of Israel's many enemies including Edom (which is also the enemy in Ps 137) in Psalm 83 are the consequences of failure to observe the covenant. Just like the psalmist in Psalm 137, the psalmist in Psalms 79 and 83 curses his enemies (Pss 79:6, 10; 83:9, 13-17) so that Jerusalem might be restored (79:9, 11-23).

4.3.1.4 Imprecation in Book IV

Book IV begins with a psalm of Moses (למשה) (Ps 90) speaking of YHWH who has been "dwelling place" for Israel in all generations (v. 1). The reminder of God as a "dwelling place" for Israel is a "direct response to the devastation of Jerusalem and the present void in the Davidic dynasty" (Stuart 2002:140). The main themes that runs through the Book IV (Pss 90-106) is "the kingship of YHWH" (especially Pss 90-99) (Wilson 1985:177). Book IV concludes with Psalms 104-106, the *hllwyh* psalms that repeat the themes of the Book IV (Wilson 1985:177, 214-219). Specifically, Psalm 106 concludes with the chronicles of "Israel's rebellious acts against YHWH" (Wilson 1985:219). Wilson's concluding remark is noteworthy,

> This chronicle concludes with a vague but certainly negative evaluation of the land and monarchy experience, which led to the exile (106:40-46). Yet YHWH's mercy still serves as the basis of future hope and the fourth book closes with a plea of its own: not a plea for YHWH to live up to his covenant obligations to David and his descendants, but a plea simply for restoration from exile (Wilson 1985:219).

Likewise, DeClaissé-Walford asserts that while Book III reflects the periods of the divided kingdoms and their exile, Book IV reflects the events of the "exodus of Egypt" and the "wilderness wandering" (DeClaissé-Walford 2004:99). Moses in Psalm 90 calls the deported people in Babylon to remember the event of the exile because the "exile in Babylon was a new wilderness" (DeClaissé-Walford 2004:99). Just as God's people did for the first time in the

[134] This is one of the terms that Walter Brueggemann coined (Brueggemann 1984:5-6).

wilderness after the exodus, now it is a time again for the deported people to learn "to rely completely on Yahweh" in a new wilderness (DeClaissé-Walford 2004:99). Thus, the reason that the theme of the exodus along with a key figure, Moses, appears in the heading of Book IV (Ps 90) is to call the deported people to trust God again.

Wilson notes that Psalm 106, a group of *hllwyh* (Pss 104-106) resonates with "the major themes which thread their ways" throughout the *Psalter* and depicts "YHWH's historical acts in behalf of Israel. Here, however, the emphasis falls once again on the rebellious response of Israel to each of YHWH's merciful acts" (Wilson 1985:219). Psalm 106 and Psalm 105 alike depict the sins of Israel by chronicling "Israel's rebellious acts against YWH" from "the Red Sea (106:7-12)" and all the way down to the "failure to destroy the inhabitants of the land (106:34-39)" (Wilson 1985:219).

Thus, the chronicle moves on to the "negative evaluation of the land and monarchy experience, which led to the exile (106:40-46)" (Wilson 1985:219). And the chronicle of this psalm concludes with "a plea for restoration from exile" (Wilson 1985:219; Jacobson 2014:806[135]): "Save us, O LORD our God, and gather us from among the nations, to give thanks to your holy name and glory in your praise!"

Psalm 94 is the only Imprecatory Psalm in Book IV. In the psalm (no heading), the psalmist confesses that God is a God of vengeance who judges and destroys the enemies of His people. Book IV is replete with laments over the destruction of Jerusalem (Pss 90, 94, 102) and concludes with the exiled people's cry for salvation from the nations (Ps 106:44-48). The themes found in Psalm 94 of Book III – vengeance, lament, judgment and restoration – are the themes also found in Psalm 137.

[135] However, Ps 106 ends with v. 48, which says, "Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel, from everlasting even to everlasting! All the people say, 'Amen!' Praise the LORD!" According to Jacobson, it is "not part of Psalm 106 proper. It is the closing doxology to Book IV of the *Psalter*" (Jacobson 2014:807).

4.3.1.5 Imprecation in Book V

Wilson and other scholars recognize that Psalm 107 is an answer to the petition the psalmist made at the end of Psalm 106[136] (Wilson 1985:220; Bullock 2001:68; DeClaissé-Walford 2014:812; Zenger 2005:101-102). In Psalm 107, the psalmist offers a thanksgiving to God and praises His steadfast love who gathered and redeemed His scattered people in foreign lands. The following table displays Psalm 106:47 and Psalm 107:1:

Psalm 106:47	Psalm 107:1-3
Save us O LORD, our God and gather us from among the nations, to give thanks to your holy name and glory in your praise!	Oh give thanks to the LORD, for he is good, for his loving-kindness is forever! Let the redeemed of the LORD say so, who he has redeemed from the hand of the enemy. And gathered from the lands, from the east and the west, from the north and from the south.

Likewise, Kirkpatrick infers that Psalm 107 is "a call to thanksgiving addressed to the returned exiles, and enforced by various instances of Jehovah's goodness to men in the manifold perils of life" (Kirkpatrick 1982:637). Likewise, Zenger says that even Psalm 107 is a "conceptual continuation of the whole of the Fourth Book of Psalms" (Zenger 2005:2).

It needs to be remembered at this point that Books II and III are replete with Psalms of Lament/Imprecation that include the exodus motif. However, in Book IV, which contains many "Enthronement (Yahweh-is-King)" Psalms (Pss 93, 95-99), there are a few either Communal or

[136] Besides this, Ps 106 (the last psalm of Book IV) and Ps 107 (the first psalm of Book V) share many themes and motifs. Zenger maintains, "Psalm 107 as a whole is so strongly linked, both semantically and conceptually, with the preceding Psalm 106 that it must be regarded as a deliberate continuation, though with an altered perspective – that is, it is the work of the redaction that, beginning with Psalm 107, presents the end of the unhappy exilic situation depicted in Psalm 106 and exhorts to thanksgiving for this rescue brought about by YHWH and to public proclamation of these 'proofs of YHWH's love,' even to the 'children of humanity' in the world of the nations. To this purpose, Psalm 107:1-3 takes up the *hôdû*-formula that begins Psalm 106 and at the same time asserts the fulfillment of the petition directed to YHWH in Psalm 106:47. It is true that Psalm 107 takes up motifs from Psalm 106, but it comes from a different milieu. Whereas Psalm 106 evidently comes from Priestly circles, Psalm 107 is the work of the group of Temple musicians; favoring this interpretation is, above all, the linguistic and conceptual affinity to Isaiah 40-66" (Zenger 2005:101-102).

Individual Psalms of Lament (Pss 90, 94, 102, 106)[137] containing no Imprecation. Book V is replete with Communal Hymns or Laments containing Imprecations (Pss 109, 129, 137, 140).

The reason why Book IV contains mainly "Enthronement (Yahweh-is-King)" Psalms with almost no laments or imprecations is because it is time for God's people to trust God completely as "the enthronement psalms salute Yahweh as the king, who has just ascended his royal throne to wield his royal power" (Mowinckel 2004:106). Just as their ancestors had to rely on God in the wilderness after the Exodus, once again they have to rely on God in the exile because God is their only hope who can restore them. And Book V, replete with Thanksgiving Hymns (Pss 111, 116, 118, 121-122, 131, 138-139, 146),[138] begins as follows, "Oh give thanks to the Lord, for He is good, for His lovingkindness is everlasting. Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, whom He has redeemed from the hand of the adversary, and gathered from the lands" (Ps 107:1-3a, NASB).

Psalm 107, has strong affinity with Psalms 146-150, the "closing *hallel*" psalms that primarily concern YHWH's delivering the Israelites out of their miseries and the exile, and that is why each psalm begins with *hallelu-ya* (praise the LORD!) (Zenger 2005:6). Thus, Psalms 146-150 end just as Psalm 107 begins, by praising the LORD for what He has done. This is how a major theme is developed: from abasement to exaltation, from destruction to renewal and from exile to restoration (VanGemeren 2005:793), and this is the reason for the psalmist's praising God. Psalm 107, also known as a wisdom psalm, functions as the "opening" to the rest of Book V. It refers to the Exodus narrative showing God's gracious intervention to save and gather Israel (Zenger 2005:2).

Book V (Pss 107-150) begins with the response to the Psalmist's Lamenting Prayer in the exile (Wilson 1985:220). Wilson says that even though David is viewed as having an "attitude of reliance and dependence" on God, the "emphasis falls on YHWH's power and former acts of mercy (especially in the Exodus, cf. Ps 114) as evidence of his trustworthiness" (Wilson 1985:227). Wilson also puts emphasis on Psalm 119, a Torah/wisdom Psalm[139] in Book V

[137] For the various *genres* that appear in Book IV, see (DeClaissé-Walford 2004:99-100).
[138] As for the *genres* that appear in Book V, see (DeClaissé-Walford 2004:113-115).
[139] Torah is what God gave to his people at Sinai, who came out of Egypt and what God once again gives to his people in Babylonian exile (DeClaissé-Walford 2004:113).

because it asks the reader to go in the "way of righteousness and life" by obeying God's law (Wilson 1985:227). It is worth noting the YHWH's kingship, which is the main theme of Book IV, reappear in Psalms 145-146, the last collection of davidic Psalms (Wilson 1985:228). Clinging on to Torah as "a viable entity" is what the restored people from the exile need to do (DeClaissé-Walford 2004:113).

What makes Book V (Pss 107-150) distinct from Book IV (Pss 90-106) is that, according to DeClaissé-Walford, King David, who was absent in Books III and IV, reappears[140] in Book V (DeClaissé-Walford 2004:113). The role David plays as described in Book V is to lead "the community of Israelites in celebrating God as king – as protector, provider, and sustainer – in this new life situation in which they find themselves" (DeClaissé-Walford 2004:113).

Wilson notes that there are three collections in Book V (Pss 107-117, 118-135 and 136-145) that indicate editorial activity based on the recurrences of the terms "*hôdû*" and "*hallelu*" (Wilson 1985:220). However, Zenger criticizes Wilson, saying that Wilson "overrates the hallelujah or the *hôdû* formulae" (Zenger 1998:87). Instead of focusing on the "*hallelu*" or the "*hôdû*" terms, Zenger rather focuses on the theme that begins from Psalm 107, that is, God's judging his enemies and restoring his people, and recognizes three collections: *pesach-hallel* (Pss 113-118), the Psalms of Ascents (Pss 120-134; Pss 135-136, "redactionally connected to the Psalms of Ascents"), and the last davidic collection (Pss 138-145) (Hossfeld & Zenger 2011:2-6). Likewise, Dennis Tucker asserts "the presence of enemy powers" in the first psalm of Book V, Psalm 107; verse 2 says "Let the redeemed of the LORD (גאולי יהוה) say, whom he has redeemed (גאלם) from the hand of the foe (מיד צר)" (v. 2) (Tucker 2014:181). Agreeing with Zenger, Tucker argues that especially the last psalms, 118, 136, and 144-145 (these psalms form an acrostic) of the collections recapitulate the theme found in Psalm 107, that God will restore His people from the hands of the enemies (vv. 6, 19). Because Zenger and Tucker's argument is more persuasive than Wilson's, this study follows Zenger and Tucker and sees the Psalms containing three collections.

[140] As for the reappearance of David, Bullock explains, "The editor of Book V installed a group of Davidic psalms (Pss 138-145) in the place of honor at the end of his collection, evidently to balance the end of the Book with the opening davidic collection of Book I" (Bullock 2001:69).

In Psalms 108-110, the davidic Psalms, themes of judgment and salvation are continued. These Davidic psalms are Lament Psalms: a Community Lament (Ps 108), an Individual Lament (Ps 109) and a Community Lament (Ps 110) (DeClaissé-Walford 2014:810). In these psalms, David praises God with the confidence that God would punish his enemies. It needs to be noted that specifically in Psalm 109, one of the Imprecatory Psalms, David speaks out imprecations against his enemies. David prays that his enemies be doomed to the point that even his children be cursed, that they be fatherless, and that they be cut off (vv. 12-13).

Psalms 111-112 have a strong affinity with Psalm 107 because they begin with "*hallelu-ya* (praise the LORD)." In these two psalms, acrostically composed, the community is called on to join the psalmist to praise God (Pss 111:1; 112:1) and to fear Him in order to get wisdom (Ps 111:10) (VanGemeren 2005:818). The acrostic form of Psalm 111 indicates the good deeds of God for Israel, and the acrostic form of Psalm 112 indicates the blessedness of men (with "blessed is the man" formula) (VanGemeren 2005:818, 824). What does the psalmist in Psalm 111 call the community to praise? He calls the community to praise God's "saving deeds for Israel" (Allen 2002:124). The psalmist in Psalm 112, a Wisdom Psalm,[141] calls the community to fear the LORD so that they might be "blessed."

The theme of God's saving deed for Israel from her enemies is continued in Psalms 113-118, the collection of the Egyptian *Hallel*. The psalmist praises God who saved Israel by delivering her out of the land of Egypt, even from death (Psalm 116:8) because of His everlasting faithfulness (Ps 117). Psalm 119, the longest psalm of the *Psalter* and acrostically structured, is classified as a Wisdom Psalm in which the palmist shows his love for God's torah[142] in the time of distress (VanGemeren 2005:858). This psalm can also be classified as a Lament Psalm (v. 107) and a Thanksgiving Psalm (v. 7) because it contains traces of both. Allen correctly observes that Psalm 119 is a psalm that "strongly influenced by the wisdom tradition" with "a number of non-

[141] Ps 112 falls into the category of a Wisdom Ps because it shows all the thematic elements of Wisdom Pss suggested Kuntz and they are "1) The fear of Yahweh and veneration of the Torah; 2) The contrasting life styles of the righteous and the wicked; 3) The reality and inevitability of retribution; 4) Miscellaneous counsels pertaining to everyday conduct" (Kuntz 1974:211-215).

[142] In this Ps the palmist uses eight words for God's torah: "law (*tôrâ*)", "word (*dābār*)", "laws (*mišpāṭîm*)", "statute(s) (*'ēdût/'ēdôt*)", "command(s) (*miṣwâ/miṣwôt*)", "decrees (*ḥuqqîm*)", "precepts (*piqqûdîm*)", "word or promise (*'imrâ*)" (Allen 2002:180; DeClaissé-Walford 2014:871; VanGemeren 2008:859-860; Kidner 2008:453-455; Zenger 2005:258).

wisdom-psalm literature features" (Allen 2002:181). This psalm is a Wisdom Psalm because it teaches that everyone is blessed who keeps God's law and awaits his salvation. The theme of keeping God's law and the theme of God's salvation appear as a pair throughout this psalm. In the psalmist' mind, themes of the Torah and of God's salvation are closely related.

As we have previously seen, Psalms 120-134 are songs of the Ascent. We have seen that in these Psalms, Zion/Jerusalem is in focus because the psalms were sung as the pilgrims ascended to Jerusalem. The themes in view are God's judgment of the enemies on behalf of His people (Psalm 129). We have also seen that Psalms 135-137 are psalms in response to the Ascents. And then follow Psalms 138-145, the last davidic collection and Psalms 146-150, the last fivefold *Hallel*.

Besides Psalm 137, there are three more Imprecatory Psalms (Pss 109, 129, 140) in Book V. Psalms 109 (לדוד מזמור) and 140 (מזמור לדוד) are Psalms of David in which David asks God for vengeance against his enemies for his salvation. The enemies that appear in Psalm 129 (המעלות שיר) are those who "hate Zion" (v. 5), against whom the psalmist asks God for vengeance (vv. 1-2, 6). Along with these Imprecatory Psalms, Book V indicates God's saving work for His people by judging their enemies. Psalm 137 can be understood in this light. Likewise the psalmist of Psalm 137 asks God for vengeance against Babylon so that Judah might be restored.

4.4 Psalm 137 in light of the canonical context of the whole *Psalter*

As previously discussed, because Book I roughly dates to the reign of king David, most of the lament psalms of David are Individual rather than Communal. David's lament/imprecation starts at Psalm 3 (referring to when David fled from Absalom, his son). In the Individual Lament Psalms (Pss 3, 5, 10, 17, 35) of Book I, when David speaks imprecations while lamenting, David asks God for salvation from the hands of his enemies. In the psalms, David seeks God's help who is in Zion/Jerusalem, the City of God (3:4; 5:7), because Zion/Jerusalem is the center of worship and represents God's presence and protection (3:4; 5:7). What needs to be paid attention to from the psalms is that David has confidence in God and his prayers are answered.

In light of David's Imprecatory Lament in Book I, the imprecation of Psalm 137 can be considered. What makes the Imprecatory Lament of Psalm 137 distinct from David's Imprecatory Lament is that the former is a Communal Psalm and exilic or post-exilic. Just as David does, the psalmist cries out to God and cursed his enemies. While David's enemies were personal or individual, the enemies of the psalmist are national ones, the Babylonians who destroyed the Jerusalem and took God's people into the captivity. Suffering from the enemies, both David and the psalmist curse them through their prayers. Both David and the psalmist pray that God would punish their enemies for their salvation. In the sense that the enemies be destroyed, the psalmist's imprecation seems no different from that of David.

In David's laments, David's Imprecatory Prayer is answered (3:4; 5:5) and David gives thanks to God for the deliverance from the enemy. However, in Psalm 137, there is no indication whether the prayer is answered and whether there is any hope or restoration for the exiled people. However, in light of David's laments, hope or restoration for the psalmist/the exiled people can be expected. God who answered David's prayer will also answer the prayer of the psalmist who is going through the exile.

In his laments, 'David' prays and hopes in his future "fellowship with God" (5:7) and in "God's righteousness" (5:8-12), while in Psalm 137, the psalmist prays and hopes for the future restoration of Israel by God's punishing her enemies (VanGemeren 2005:116-117, 950-953). If their prayer is answered, and if they will move from the status of disorientation to that of reorientation, they will be able to praise God for salvation. This is the reason why David/the psalmist curses their enemies. Thus, the laments of both David (Book I) and the psalmist (Ps 137) oscillate between two groups of related themes: lament/imprecation/hope (disorientation) and restoration/praise/thanksgiving (reorientation).

Book II is the continuation of Book I in the sense that the Individual Laments and Imprecations replete in Book I reappear in Book II. Thus, whereas in Books I and II, in which most psalms are Individual Laments in a pre-exilic context, the psalmists ask God for personal vengeance against enemies, in Books III to V, in which most palms are Community Psalms in exilic or post-exilic contexts, the psalmists typically ask God for vengeance against their national enemies, especially

the Babylonians. Thus, the way that God would destroy the national enemies in accordance with the psalmists' Imprecatory Prayer is war. As we have previously seen, the violent description of babies being dashed against rock is what takes place during war. In this light, the psalmist's imprecation can be understood.

Psalm 137 can be interpreted in the light of Book III. Because Book III assumes the destruction of Jerusalem, most of its psalms are Communal Laments.[143] It has also been discussed that Book III of the *Psalter* deals with hope for God's people because God will remember his covenant and restore them. The pathos of the exiled people in Book III is exactly how Psalm 137 begins, "By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion" (v. 1). However, Book III does not stop at the pathos of the exile in Psalm 137 but it moves beyond it. Book III has the message of hope for the exiles that one day God will remember the covenant that He had made with their forefathers and restore them.

Psalm 137 can be read in the light of the 'exodus' events of Book IV. The exodus accounts in Book IV mean to be a reminder for the exiles in Babylon in Psalm 137 that it is a time they need to rely on God in a foreign land just like their ancestors did in the land of Egypt and in the wilderness. The imprecations in Psalm 137 can be read in the light of Book V[144], especially in light of Psalm 107. The psalmist in Psalm 107, the first psalm of Book V, tells the readers that wisdom is from God who redeemed and delivered Israel from her enemies. Thus, as located at the beginning of Book V, Psalm 107 mirrors the themes of Psalm 137. In Psalm 137, the psalmist cries out to God to take vengeance against his enemies on behalf of the exiled people. The psalmist prays that in the day when Jerusalem would be restored, the enemy-nations that afflicted Judah would be utterly destroyed. The theme of God's delivering Israel from the enemies is recapitulated (past event in Ps 107 and future event in Ps 137). Certainly, the theme of imprecation in Psalm 137 emphasizes the judgment of God against the enemies. The psalmist has

[143] As for the differences and similarities between Individual Laments and Communal Laments, Christopher Gilbert explains, "Like individual laments, communal laments also manifest the idea that well-being and suffering are linked to action or inaction on the part of the Lord. But unlike individual laments, communal laments tend to stress Israel's historic relationship with the Lord, and usually seek the Lord's help against some mutual external enemy" (Gilbert 2009:115).

[144] In Book V, according to VanGemeren, two opposite themes: judgment and restoration are developed: "God's power in abasement and exaltation, destruction and renewal, and exile and restoration from exile" (VanGemeren 2008:793).

faith that God who punished the Egyptians a long time ago will certainly punish their current enemies, the Edomites and the Babylonians. While Psalm 107 contains what God did to the enemies in the past by thanksgiving and praise, Psalm 137 contains what God will do to the enemies by lament and imprecation.

The theme of God certainly punishing the enemies becomes clearer and understandable and can be further supported elsewhere in Book V. As previously discussed, the theme of God's judgment of the enemies is also found in Psalms 120-134, the Songs of the Ascents. Because some of the Songs of the Ascents are Lament Psalms, it is not unnatural that Psalm 129, a Lament Psalm, contains imprecations in which the psalmist curses "those who hate Zion" (v. 5). Even among the last collection of Davidic Psalms, Psalms 138-145, which is mostly Lament Psalms, 'David', the psalmist in Psalm 139, speaks imprecations with the words of wisdom: "God's enemies are my enemies" (v. 22) and "seeking not the wicked way, but God's way" (vv. 23-24). In connection with this, the psalmist in Psalm 137 has confidence that God would certainly punish his enemies and would eventually restore him/Jerusalem to God's way. If the palmist's Imprecatory Prayer is answered, his enemies are punished and the exiled are restored, he would praise God the way the psalmist of Psalms 146-150 praises God for His "delivering the Israelites out of their miseries and the exiles."

The psalmist and the exiled people in Psalm 137 who know well of the God's mighty saving deeds from the Exodus narrative have confidence that God once again will eventually perform a mighty deed on their behalf. The psalmist's imprecation will make God's judgment on the enemies certain. With the psalmist's retributive prayer, the fate between Judah and the enemies will eventually be reversed: Babylon will be punished and Judah will be restored. Once the enemies are punished and judged, Judah will be able to praise God in the status of restoration.

4.5 Synthesis

As discussed above, the *Psalter* begins with a Wisdom Psalm (Ps 1) and a Royal Psalm (Ps 2) as an introduction that makes a sharp contrast between the life/fate of the righteous and the life/fate of the wicked. It has been discussed that Psalms 1-2 as an introduction and Psalm 3 as the first

psalm of Book I play an important role for the rest of the *Psalter* because they certainly introduce the themes of the rest of the *Psalter*: wisdom, kingship, lament, divine deliverance and so on. The psalmists are only human beings who need deliverance and protection from God. They are only human beings who God has made and who face many difficult moments. They cannot help but lament sometimes with imprecations that are solely based on God's covenantal words of hope, not on personal vengeful sentiments. Psalms 1-2 show that the psalmists should pay a close attention to wisdom (Torah) (Ps 1), and should know that only God is the King (Ps 2).

It has been discussed that this concept continues throughout the five books of the *Psalter*. Especially the concept of lament/imprecation goes even up to our pericope, Psalm 137. The imprecation spoken by the psalmist in Psalm 137 is parallel to the imprecation in Psalm 3. It has also been discussed that there is a shift from lament to praise indicating God's delivering and restoring of his people. We have noted that there is also a shift from human kings to the King YHWH. The focus of the Books I to III is on David and in Books IV to V the focus is on God showing that the hope for restoration totally depends on Him. Thus, the psalmist's a rhetorical question, "How long, O LORD?" (Pss 6:3; 13:1-2; 35:17; 94:3) will not be left unanswered.

In conclusion, reading Psalm 137 in the canonical context of five books of the whole *Psalter* proves that the psalmist's imprecation against his enemies – even dashing the infants – is not contrary to the message of the whole *Psalter*, but is in harmony with it. Now, we turn to the next chapter in order to first deal with the passages that show intertextual connection with Psalm 137 in terms of theme of imprecation involving the death of the infants and then to read the psalm in light of those passages.

Chapter 5
PSALM 137 IN THE CANONICAL CONTEXT OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

5.1 Introduction

This chapter attempts to interpret the "imprecation" theme or Imprecatory Prayer of Psalm 137 by reading the psalm in the literary context of the Old Testament. The selected passages (Dt 32:25; 2 Ki 8:12; Is 13:16; Jr 51:22; Hs 14:1; Nah 3:10) show intertextual connections with Psalm 137 in terms of the "imprecation" theme and its related themes like judgment, restoration and so on. Before reading the psalm in the literary context of the Old Testament, the theological themes of each book that contain the curse of the death of the infants are discussed.

5.2 Imprecation in Deuteronomy 32:25

The first imprecatory expression of infants being killed is found in Moses' Song (Dt 31:30-32:47) in Moses' third speech, which is about the "preparation for Moses' Passing" (Dt 28:69-34:12) (Biddle 2003:6). Deuteronomy consists of Moses' three speeches of unequal length: the first speech (Dt 1:1-4:43), the second speech (Dt 4:44-28:68) and the third speech (Dt 28:69 [29:1 Eng]-34:12). Specifically, Moses' curse involving the death of infants is found in Deuteronomy 32:23-27 which contains curses by natural disaster (vv. 23-24) and sword/war (vv. 25-27) as part of God's judgment against Israel. Here is the passage,

> For a fire is kindled by my anger, and it burns to the lowest part of Sheol, devours the earth and its produce, and sets on fire the foundations of the mountains. "'And I will heap disasters upon them; I will use my arrows on them; they will be wasted with hunger, and devoured by plague and bitter destruction; I will send the teeth of beasts against them, with the venom of crawling things of the dust. (vv. 23-24)
>
> Outdoors the sword will bereave, and indoors terror, for young man and virgin alike, the nursing child with the man of gray hairs. I would have said, "I will cut them to pieces; I will wipe them from the memory of them from men," had I not feared provocation by the

> enemy, lest their adversaries should misunderstand, lest they should say, "Our hand is exalted, the Lord has not done all this." (vv. 25-27)

At the moment of transition from Moses to Joshua, while making the final speech to Israel, why does Moses utter such curses against Israel? The reason is found in the nearer context of the passage. It is because of Israel's sin of forsaking God and serving foreign gods and idols, especially when they are well-off with the abundant wealth given by God (vv. 15-21).

Before proceeding any further, it is necessary to discuss briefly the term "Deuteronomy" in order to better understand the curse. The term "Deuteronomy", originally from the Greek LXX (Δευτερονόμιον), means, "the second law", is misleading in connection with the rest of the Pentateuch because "Deuteronomy" is not some kind of "additional" law (Biddle 2003:1; McConville 2004:17; Woods 2011:26). Rather, "Deuteronomy" means to reiterate, renew, recapitulate or explicate the "law given at Sinai in preached form" (Biddle 2003:1; Woods 2011:26). McConville argues that 'Deuteronomy' "re-presents and inculcates the requirements of the covenant" (McConville 2004:17). Tigay notes that "the second law" is misleading because in Deuteronomy 17:18, the phrase "a copy of the Teaching (משנה התורה)" appears which indicates that Deuteronomy is not an addition to the rest of the Pentateuch but "recapitulates" the teachings of Moses from Genesis to Numbers (Tigay 1996:xi). Besides this, Tigay notes that the phrase, "this book of Teaching (*sefer ha-torah ha-zo't*)" in Deuteronomy refers to "the Teaching of Moses (*torat mosheh*)" in the rest of the Pentateuch as a whole (Tigay 1996:xi). In short, "this book of teaching" is the teaching of Moses in Deuteronomy.

As Woods notes, the Law was "integral to life" not only before Sinai but after Sinai (Woods 2011:35). The Law was developed "in the needs of new times and places" (Woods 2011:35). The covenant at Sinai was "not a once-and-for-all event" but was an event that "inaugurated a continuing relationship between God and people" and that had to be renewed regularly because each generation of Israel "had to recommit itself regularly in love and obedience to the Lord of the covenant" (Craigie 1976:37). Thus, Deuteronomy is not about another law added in addition to the previously given covenant in Genesis to Numbers, but about the renewal of the covenant.

5.3 Theological themes of Deuteronomy

There is consensus among scholars that God, God's people (Israel), covenant and land are main theological themes that tie together the whole of Deuteronomy (Block 2012:38-41; Craigie 1976:36-45; Mayes 1981:55-81; Tigay 1996:xii-xvii; Woods 2011:55-72). Dealing with the theology of Deuteronomy is significant because it sets "the theological foundation" for the later canonical books (the Former and Latter Prophets and the *Psalter*), especially in terms of "the blessings and curses delineated in chapters 27 and 28" (Grisanti 2012:465). As for the role and influence of Deuteronomy within the rest of the canon, Daniel Block explains, "The written copies of Moses' last addresses to Israel were to be recognized as authoritative and canonical from the beginning" (Block 2012: 33).

5.3.1 God

The theology of Deuteronomy begins with the doctrine of God because, as Woods notes, all the generations of Israel had to adhere to God by keeping the Torah (Woods 2011:55). This God to whom Israel has to show homage is the God who initiates a covenant with them at Sinai/Horeb, and according to the covenant, God "delivers and protects his special people from Egyptian bondage and oppression, and is deeply concerned about their present and future social, political and religious well-being" (Woods 2011:55). Deuteronomy is about a "call" to serve God by keeping the law and worshiping God at a single sanctuary that is, "the place YHWH will choose (המקום אשר יחבר יהוה)" (Mayes 1981:57).

5.3.2 God's people, Israel

Deuteronomy develops a theology of the people of God, Israel. As Tigay explains, "Israel owes her very existence to God, who created her, redeemed her from Egypt, and chose Israel for a special relationship with Him" (Tigay 1996:xv). This theme is often discussed with the doctrine of election in the sense that God elected Israel to be "His covenant people" to whom He gives "special attention" (Block 2012:39). For example, Deuteronomy 4:32-40 shows how God has been the God of Israel by creating them (v. 32), rescuing them from Egypt with mighty wonders

(vv. 33-37), leading them into a new land (v. 38), and commanding them to keep His statutes and commandments (vv. 39-40).

5.3.3 Covenant

Deuteronomy exhibits the concept of covenant, which is actually found even before Deuteronomy in Genesis 15:18, 17:7 (Abrahamic covenant) and Exodus 19:5 (Sinai/Horeb covenant) (Mayes 1981:65). The covenant relationship between God and Israel plays an important role throughout Deuteronomy because this concept involves many important aspects in the God-Israel relationship: 1) "the compact between God and Israel"; 2) "stipulations required by God"; 3) "Israel's promise to obey them"; and 4) "God's promise to reward obedience and punish disobedience" (Tigay 1996:xiv).

Throughout Deuteronomy the place Sinai/Horeb (Horeb is used more often) reappears each time the covenant is renewed (4:10-14; 5:2-4; 6:20-25; 26:16-19). However, the covenant God made with his people was "the fulfillment of the covenant he had made with Abraham and an extension of his commitment to his descendants (*cf*. Gn 17:7)" (Block 2012:39). The covenant God made with his people at Mount Sinai (Ex 19-24) is renewed at Mount Horeb (Dt 26:16-19). By renewing the covenant in Deuteronomy, God makes certain "his commitment" to the descendants of Abraham.

5.3.4 Land

The last theme that Deuteronomy presents is land. As Block correctly notes, each time the covenant is renewed, Moses calls heaven and earth to "witness against (העידתי ב)" Israel (4:26; 30:19; 31:28) (Block 2012:40). God's promise of giving land to Israel is a recurrent theme ever since the Abrahamic covenant of Genesis 12, and it is mentioned again each time the covenant is renewed. Land is what God promised the patriarchs and their descendants (Tigay 1996:xvi).

Getting into the promised land is "conditional" (4:1) because it depends on how Israel will act; if they keep the covenant, they will enter and if they do not keep it, they will not (Block 2012:59;

Tigay 1996:xvi). The land is theologically significant because "it is the place where God's laws are to be carried out and where a society pursuing justice and righteousness (4:5-8) and living in harmony with God (7:12-13) can be established" (Tigay 1996:xvi). The covenant of Deuteronomy is conditional because the people of God are required to obey the law; what God requires of them is "obedience" (Block 2012:39). God's covenant curses instead of his blessings will be upon them, if they disobey the covenant.

5.4 Imprecation in the nearer context of Deuteronomy 32:25

To some degree, scholars vary[145] on the structure of Moses' song. However, there is a general consensus that the song has an exordium (the call on heaven and earth to listen Moses' song) (32:1-4) and coda (the praise of God for His salvation) (v. 43). Although there is some disagreement, the "body" section (vv. 5-42) of the Song roughly consists of 1) a recollection of the history of God's faithful dealing with unfaithful Israel (vv. 5-18), 2) God's decision to punish Israel (vv. 19-25), and 3) God's limiting the punishment of Israel and instead punishing the enemies (vv. 26-42).

Now, here is the curse, "Outdoors the sword shall bereave, and indoors terror, for young man and young girl alike, the nursing child with the man of gray hairs. I would have said, 'I will cut them to pieces' (vv. 25-26)." Why does Moses utter this song? Moses utters the song to express how the God of justice will deal with his people when they disobey the commands of God's covenant by going after other gods. The target of this judgment will be people of all ages, from "nursing babies" to "gray haired men"; it could be anybody among those listening to the song of Moses. "Young man and young girl" and "the nursing child and the man of gray hairs" in v. 26 are

[145] Scholars have proposed the following structures of the Song. According to Block, the Song is outlined into five parts. "1) the exordium: a call to acknowledge the perfections of Yahweh (vv. 1-4). 2) The recollection: a call to acknowledge the imperfections of Yahweh's people (vv. 5-18). 3) The Confession: a call to recognize the justice of Yahweh (vv. 19-35). 4) the gospel: a call to treasure the compassion of Yahweh (Vv. 36-42). 5) The coda: a call to celebrate the deliverance of Yahweh (v. 43)" (Block 2012:746-747). According to Christensen, the Song can be divided into three section: "First Cycle: God's Blessing of Israel in Times Past (32:1-14). Second Cycle: Israel's Sin Provokes God's Anger (32:15-29). Third Cycle: God's Punishment and Salvation (32:30-43)" (Christensen 2001:xi) According to Tigay, the Song is outlined into four parts. "1) Exordium, inviting heaven and earth to pay attention as the poet declares God's qualities (vv. 1-3), 2) History of God's relations with Israel (vv. 4-18). 3) God's decision to limit Israel's punishment and punish the enemy (vv. 19-42), 4) Coda: celebration of God's deliverance of Israel (v. 43) (Tigay 1996:299).

merisms (parts comprises a whole) indicating that the whole assembly of Israel will be judged from the youngest to the oldest (Block 2012:761).

Deuteronomy 32:23-25 indicates that the means by which God will punish the people are various disasters (רעות): arrows (חץ), hunger (רעב), plague (רשף), pestilence (טבק), beasts (בהמות) and sword (חרב). As commentators note, the disaster in Deuteronomy 32:25 is described in the image of war (Christensen 2001:807-808; Tigay 1996:309). The word sword together with the words of disasters given above (especially arrows and pestilence) comprise a metaphor[146] for devastation in war (Christensen 2001:807). The way that the people including the nursing babies are killed is by the enemy's sword at war.

As the structure of Moses' song shows, Deuteronomy does not conclude with a warning against apostasy. It also contains a message of hope for the people, that God will deliver Israel by punishing the enemy (vv. 26-42). This is the last message that Moses speaks to Israel, "Even though God will punish you who are disobedient, He will not destroy you completely, but rather deliver you." This is the reason that the song ends with the coda of praising God, "Rejoice with him, O heavens; bow down to him, all gods, for he avenges the blood of his children and takes vengeance on his adversaries. He repays those who hate him and cleanses his people's land" (32:43, ESV).

The first speech shows how Israel had been unfaithful to God and the covenant and that the first generation of the exodus was prohibited from entering the promised land (1:19-33). As a penalty for unfaithfulness, God sent the Amorites to defeat Israel (vv. 34-46). The generation of the exodus spent 40 years in the wilderness (2:1-25) and Moses was forbidden to enter the land (3:23-29). Having reminded the people of the past experience and of the penalty they received, once again, Moses commands the people to obey the commandments of God and forbids idolatry (4:1-40). Thus, the first speech of Moses gives a lesson to the new generation that they should not follow in the unfaithful steps of their forefathers but rather should keep the covenant lest they be punished.

[146] Concerning the images of arrow, pestilence and plague, Christensen refers to Resheph, god of pestilence in Syro-Canaanite religion (Christensen 2001:807).

5.5 Imprecation in the broader context of Deuteronomy 32:25

In the first speech (1:1-4:43), after a brief introduction of the setting of Deuteronomy (1:1-5), the speech recollects the past events in which Israel experienced God's grace after the Exodus (McConville 2004:201-206). In the last recollection of the first speech (4:1-43), God's people are called to obey God's laws (statutes and rules) in order that they may live and possess the promised land which God promised to give to their forefathers (v. 1) (Woods 2011:38). While the first speech focuses on past events, the second speech (4:44-28:68) focuses on how Israel will keep God's commands in the future (Woods 2011:73-74). In this speech, Moses tells the people how God made a covenant with them at Horeb (Dt 5:1), and exhorts them to keep the laws and statutes of God faithfully (5:1-11:32) (Miller 2000:163).

The second speech (4:44-28:68) is futuristic in the sense that based on the covenant that God made with his people at Horeb (Dt 5:1), Moses exhorts them to keep the laws and statutes of God faithfully as they enter the promised land (5:1-11:32) (McConville 2004:206-225). Moses, moreover, asks them to remember how the Lord their God faithfully led them forty years in the wilderness (Dt 8) (McConville 2004:209-210). Then, Moses tells the people the laws of the covenant that they should be careful to do in detail in the promised land (Dt 12:1-26:19) (Woods 2011:38-40, 74). The covenant commands what they should do and should not do; they should worship God at the place that God will choose and they should not worship other gods and idols (12:1-13:18). In Deuteronomy 27, the covenant that is to be renewed in the promised land is mentioned. As they enter the land ("on the day that you cross the Jordan to the land"), they are to write all the commands of God on stones and build an altar to the Lord. This covenant renewal is followed by the covenant blessings and curses; if they obey, they will receive blessings and if they disobey, curses (Dt 28:1-28:68) (Miller 2000:163).

In his third speech (28:69-34:12), Moses exhorts the people to observe faithfully the covenant laws (McConville 2004:225-232). In this speech, Moses prepares Israel for the future by appointing Joshua as his successor (31:1-8) and gives the law to the priests, the sons of Levi so that they may read before the people in the land that they may observe the law (vv. 9-13) (Woods

2011:76). Then, Moses' song follows. The text says that Moses sings in order to complete what he had spoken so far to the assembly of Israel (31:30).

So, why does Moses sing? For what purpose? What is the function of Moses' song in the middle of Moses' third speech? Moses' song, whose style is "typical of biblical poetry" (Tigay 1996:298), was, according to Craigie, "recited initially" and "in this manner it was taught to the people (*cf.* 31:19), with a view to being sung by them subsequently" (Craigie 1976:373). Deuteronomy 31:19 shows that the purpose of the song is didactic, that is, to teach the people of Israel: "Now therefore write this song and teach it to the people of Israel. Put it in their mouths, that this song may be a witness for me against the people of Israel." This song is sung first by Moses and then sung by the assembly of the people in Moses' farewell speech. It can be seen that the song is meant to teach the people all the commands of the covenant that Moses had spoken to them. Craigie correctly says, "The song functions as a part of the witness to the renewal of the covenant; when the Israelites sang it, they would bear witness to their understanding and agreement to the full terms and implications of the covenant" (Craigie 1976:373). Specifically, the song warns the people that if they disobey the covenant of God, they would anticipate certain "consequences" in the sense that their disobedience would bring God's judgment on themselves (Tigay 1996:298). Because of the importance of the function of Moses' song within Moses' third speech, Craigie maintains that the song is not an "appendix[147] to the book of Deuteronomy" and that it should be considered as part of Moses' speech (Craigie 1976:373).

5.6 Imprecation in the canonical context of the Pentateuch

It has been discussed that Deuteronomy deals with the renewal of the covenant. It has also been discussed that the themes that unite the book of Deuteronomy are God, God's people (Israel), covenant and land. The theology of Deuteronomy – the covenantal relation between God and Israel with blessings and curses – set the foundation for the theology of the canonical books that follow. As the term Deuteronomy means renewal of the covenant, it is necessary to look

[147] Craigie does not mention the scholars who regard the song as an appendix. However, those who deal with it in separation from third speech include: (Mayes 1981:110; Tigay 1996:xii; Woods 2011:76).

backwards to the previous covenants of Genesis-Numbers. From Genesis to Numbers, the most significant incidents are creation (Genesis), exodus, the Mosaic covenant (Exodus), and the Sinai covenant (Leviticus). In examining these incidents, this study will be able to take heed not only of Deuteronomy but also of the rest of the Pentateuch.

In many ways, the book of Genesis foreshadows future events of Israel, just as the final shape of the canonical Pentateuch reflects the following narratives of the rest of the Old Testament "typologically and futuristically" (Sailhamer 2005:37). The book of Genesis is "narrative-typological"[148] because it reads the future in light of the past events (Sailhamer 2005:37). It is also "futuristic" because Israel's future should be read as "it was once anticipated and interpreted through the lens of the prophetic hope" (Sailhamer 2005:37). Especially the future fate of Israel – whether they will be blessed or cursed – can be understood in the earlier contexts of God's covenantal words with their forefathers like Abraham. Thus, we seek to see how the imprecations found in the post-exilic setting of Psalm 137 can be understood in light of the earlier covenants beginning from Genesis-Deuteronomy, since in those events of the past "the dualistic natures of the covenant" – the blessings and the curses – are emphasized (Elliot 2000:291).

Thus, in this study, any passages that contain curses and blessings will be given attention and discussed. The term curse along with blessing occur in the very beginning of Genesis. After creating the living creatures and Adam and Eve, God blessed them, that they would "be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth" (vv. 22, 26). It can be seen that the very initial narrative of God's creation has to do with God's promise of the seed. However, the promise of seed is endangered by the sins of humanity. Because of Adam and Eve's sin, God cursed the serpent and the ground, put enmity between the serpent and Eve and between its offspring and her offspring, and made Eve's childbirth painful (3:14-19). Later, the sins of Noah's contemporaries (which led to the Flood) and the people of Babel who built the tower indeed seemed to endanger the promise and blessing of the seed (Longman 2016:160). Besides these hindrances to the blessings, the barrenness of Sarah seems to make this blessing even more impossible (Gn 11:30).

[148] According to Sailhamer, narrative-typology is different from typology in that the latter seeks to read "the past in light of the future" (Sailhamer 2005:36).

In order to grasp the meaning of the curse, it is necessary first to understand its counterpart term, blessing. The Hebrew word for "to bless" is ברך and occurs[149] in the Pentateuch most often in Genesis and Deuteronomy (over 160 times) (McKeown 2003:83). Curse is the very opposite of blessing because "to curse (ארר)" means "to remove from God's protection and favor" (Walton 2001:229). Curse indicates a broken relationship between God and God's people (McKweon 2003:84) and it "operates as judgment" against the people when the covenant is broken (Brown 1997:525). Blessings will overtake those who obey; curses will overtake those who disobey (Brown 1997:763).

Blessing and curse occur in the context of the covenant relationship between God and His people, and the meaning of these terms "are often contingent on the context in which they occur" (McKweon 2003:84). In dealing with these terms, the narrative of the call of Abraham (12:1-3) is the most significant passage in which the word blessing occurs five times and the word curse one time (McKweon 2003:83). God, who blessed all the creatures, humankind and the Sabbath after creation (Gn 1:2-1), appeared to Abram in order to bless him by making a covenant with him and make him a blessing to "all the families of the earth" (Stuart 2002:24; Wenham 2008:33).

Because of God's blessing, all the creatures of the world created by God were able to teem and fill the earth; because of God's blessing, Abraham would be a father of many descendants and all the people of the world be blessed through him (Waltke 2001:45. 203). The term, "blessing" means, according to Walton, "a blessing is an offering of God's favor (if coming from God) or a wish for God's favor (if coming from humans)" or "to put [a] person under God's protection" (Walton 2001:53, 229).

In the narrative of the call of Abraham, at least three promises of God can be delineated: the promise of land (v. 1), that Abraham would become a great nation (v. 2), and that Abraham would become a channel of blessing for others (v. 3). But God made also a promise of a curse on behalf of Abraham against those who would curse him. The promise of curse was announced because, as Sarna explains, Abaraham will need "God's providential care" during his long trip in

[149] It occurs five times in the narrative of the call of Abraham (12:1-3) (McKeown 2003:83).

a foreign land, and this comes to expression in that "whoever maltreats him will be punished with exceptional severity" (Sarna 1989:89). The blessing and curse in this covenant that God made with Abraham foreshadows the blessing and curse in the "great covenant-affirming ceremony" in passages of the Mosaic covenant (Lv 26; Dt 27-28) (Sarna 1989:89; Waltke 2001:203).

In the book of Exodus, the Mosaic covenant was established and the covenant law was given at Mount Sinai (19:1-24:11) after the deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt (1:1-15:21). The Sinai covenant in Exodus is "foundational" for understanding the relation between God and his people Israel throughout the Old Testament (Moberly 2008:42). By making the covenant, God commanded the people to keep the covenant law in order to be God's possession, his special people (19:5). After the covenant law was given, while Moses was still at the top of the mountain, the Israelites broke the covenant by making a golden calf (32:1-6). Because of their sin, 3000 men were slain and a plague from God was sent on them (32:27-35). After Moses' intercession for the people, the covenant was renewed (34:1-28).

The book of Leviticus "picks up" where the book of Exodus "left off": the tent of meeting, (Ex 40:34-38; Lv 1:1) which indicates that Leviticus is a continuation of Exodus (Stuart 2002:43). The laws for the Levites are given in Leviticus "regarding their priestly duties" (Stuart 2002:43). The book of Exodus emphasizes that God delivered the Israelites from the bondage. In Leviticus, the Israelites, the tabernacle, and the implements for worship are called to be holy, just as God is holy (Redditt 2008:55, 57). The book of Leviticus, placed in the middle of the Pentateuch, plays an important role throughout the rest of the Old Testament, emphasizing the holiness of God and Israel's obligation to be holy (Redditt 2008:57). In Leviticus, the Israelites are warned that if they fail to keep the covenant (in other words, fail to be holy), they would experience the judgment of God (26:27-39).

The Holiness Code in Leviticus 17-27 shows that the Israelites will receive blessings or curses depending on how they behave (ch. 26). God promises blessings of peace and productivity in the promised land if Israel faithfully obeys all the commandments of God (vv. 3-13) (Levine 1989:182). The blessing in this passage is certainly reminiscent of the blessings promised to

Abraham. Curses are also announced ("more space is devoted to the punishments"). If the people disobey, they will experience "horrible punishments" involving "defeat and disease, natural disaster and the exile in foreign lands" (vv. 14-45) (Levine 1989:182). The blessings and curses of the holiness code (26:1-46) are "incentives" for the Israelites to "keep the covenant" (Stuart 2002:48).

However, the Israelites did not keep the covenant. God did not allow the generation of the exodus to enter the promised land. The next generation likewise disobeyed and did not keep the covenant and spent 40 years in the wilderness before entering the promised land (Sparks 2008:58). In Numbers, the Israelites fail to keep the covenant. Despite Israel's unfaithfulness, God shows His faithfulness to them by keeping them safe in the wilderness and by eventually allowing them to enter the promised land (Sparks 2008:61; Stuart 2002:49).

5.7 Psalm 137 in light of Deuteronomy 32:25 and the Pentateuch[150]

Based on the discussion of the "imprecation" theme above and its related themes like judgment and the covenant relation between God and Israel, which permeate the Pentateuch, this section offers an interpretation of the imprecation of Psalm 137. There certainly is an affinity between Psalm 137 and Deuteronomy 32:25 especially in terms of the 'imprecation' theme.

Imprecations throughout the Pentateuch show intertextual connection with the imprecation of Psalm 137 in various ways. The exile experienced by God's people in Psalm 137 certainly echoes the curse passages of the Pentateuch: Leviticus 26:1-46 and Deuteronomy 28:15-68, 32:25-26. The exile in the foreign land certainly indicates the state of being cursed. Certainly, these passages show the reason why the people were experiencing the exile in the foreign land of Babylon, namely, because they disobeyed the covenants. The blessings and curses that appear in the creation account (Gn 1-11) and in the account of the Abramaic covenant (12:1-3) foreshadow

[150] Any attempt to interpret the meaning of a text in light of other related texts and to see how the meaning of the text is "shaped by" other related texts is known as "intertextuality" (Stead 2013:355). In other words, the meaning of a text can be understood once read in light of other texts. Steve Moyise's explanation of the term is worth noting, "No text is an island (…), it cannot be understood in isolation. It can only be understood as part of a web or matrix of other texts, themselves only to be understood in the light of other texts. Each new text disturbs the fabric of existing texts as it jostles for a place in the canon of literature. Intertextuality suggests that the meaning of a text is not fixed but open to revision as new texts come along and reposition it" (Moyise 2002:418).

or anticipate the blessings and curses in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 and 32. In this way, the Pentateuch shows "canonical affinities" with Israel's being cursed in Psalm 137 because the Pentateuch certainly speaks of the consequences of breaking the covenant (McConville 2012:345).

In Moses' song (Dt 31:30-32:47) God's people are warned that if they disobey the laws of the covenant of God, God would certainly punish them by letting their enemies make war against them and kill all the people including the nursing infants. In Psalm 137, the psalmist prays to God that the Babylonians' infants should be dashed against the rock. We have seen that based on Moses' song in Deuteronomy, the language of infants being killed is an image of war. So, this is the first point to be recognized when reading Psalm 137 in light of Moses' song. The second point is that we are able to see why God's people are in the foreign land, Babylon. It is because of the people's unending and continual apostasy. God warned through Moses (as in Moses's song in Deuteronomy), and many other prophets (throughout the Old Testament) that if they disobey and break the covenant, God will eventually punish them. Because of the apostasy, God first punished the Northern Kingdom Israel and destroyed by means of Assyria. Thus also the Southern Kingdom Judah was taken away into exile, into the foreign land of Babylon. As the setting of the psalm indicates (v. 1), by the waters of Babylon, the psalmist and the people "sat down and wept, remembering Zion."

The third point is that in light of Moses' song, the psalmist's Imprecatory Prayer can be considered as retribution, "O Daughter of Babylon, doomed to be devastated, blessed will be the one who repays you with the recompense with which you have done to us!" (v. 8). From Moses' song, God's people certainly learned that in the middle of being punished by the enemies sent by God, punishment is not the last word, but that God would certainly deliver them by punishing the enemies. That is why the psalmist exclaims, "Blessed will be the one who repays you with the recompense with which you have done to us!" The last point to recognize is that there is certainly hope for God's people in exile based on Moses' song. Deuteronomy speaks clearly about Israel's future. God says that because "vengeance and recompense" are his (32:35), he will punish the enemies in order to "vindicate" and "have compassion" on his people (32:36).

Therefore, the imprecation expressed by the psalmist in the (post-)exilic setting is related to the imprecation in Deuteronomy. Judgment on Judah, the imprecation (the death of little children) and the restoration of Judah are all predicted in Deuteronomy. The psalmist knew that God's judgment on the nations would be dreadfully severe.

5.8 Imprecation in 2 Kings 8:12

Another passage that contains a curse involving the death of infants appears in the narrative of the anointing of Hazel (2 Ki 8:7-15) in the Elisha cycle (2:1-9:37) during the reign of Jehoram (king Ahab's son) in the northern kingdom of Israel (Brueggemann 2000:4; Patterson 2010:633). Elisha prophesies to Hazael, the envoy sent by Aram's King Ben-Hadad (8:7-8) concerning Judah, "You will kill their young men with the sword, dash their little children in pieces and rip open their pregnant women" (v. 12fgh). Elisha prophesies that Hazael, the future king of Aram, would do evil things to the Israelites. Indeed, after Hazael became the king of Aram by killing Ben-Hadad (2 Ki 8:15), Hazael "oppressed Israel all days of Jehoahaz"[151] (2 Ki 13:22). But why does Elisha prophesy that Hazael would become the oppressor against Israel for a long time? Why does Hazael oppress Israel? In order to answer these questions, this section first deals with the themes that hold 1-2 Kings together as a whole canonical unit and then looks at the nearer and broader contexts of Elisha's prophecy concerning Hazael in 2 Kings 8:7-15 in order to see how the whole of 1-2 Kings contributes to the interpretation of Elisha's imprecation.

5.9 Theological themes of 1-2 Kings

5.9.1 Deuteronomistic history

1-2 Kings continue the narrative of 1-2 Samuel and both share the same theological themes because 1-2 Kings as well as 1-2 Samuels, as many scholars note, belong to the deuteronomic-deuteronomistic[152] history (Arnold & Beyer 1998:246; Dillard & Longman 1994:161-62; Stuart

[151] Other instances of Hazael's oppression of Israel are found in the following scriptural references: 1 Ki 19:17; 2 Ki 8:13; 2 Ki 10:32; 2 Ki 13:3-4.

[152] Beginning with Martin Noth and his influence, it was widely accepted that the books from Deuteronomy to Kings were a single unified work of one redactor, called the Deuteronomist (abbreviated Dtr.) during the exile. Following and modifying Noth's argument, scholars like Cross, Nelson and Provan argue for "double redaction". This means that redaction was first initiated by a dtr during Josiah's reform and then updated by another dtr during the exile

2002:63, 83-85, 92-94). Dealing with the prophecy of Elisha in 2 Kings 8 from the perspective of Deuteronomy (blessing or curse depending on obedience) provides a clue to understanding the imprecation in Psalm 137 because 1-2 Kings can be understood in the broader context of the history of Israel since the Exodus up to the exile, during which the fortune of Israel depends on her faithfulness/unfaithfulness to God's covenant laws (Dillard & Longman 1994:165; Stuart 2002:63, 70-71)

As a renewal of previous covenants, Deuteronomy looks backward and forward; it reminds Israel of how God has been faithful to Israel (chs. 1-4) and encourages them to keep the covenant for blessings as reward because otherwise, they will be cursed (Stuart 2002:56). Certainly, the influence of Deuteronomy on the historical books or the former prophets that follow is dominant. The "continuation of Israel's history (Jos-Ki) is written mostly from its perspective" and that is why the historical portion is called the deuteronomic history" (Stuart 2002:56).

Thus, the themes of Kings are "marked by the same theological themes and vocabulary that characterized Joshua-Samuel" from the perspective of the Mosaic covenant described in Deuteronomy (Dillard & Longman 1994:152; Stuart 2002:92-94). For this reason, books from Joshua to 2 Kings should be regarded as "a single literary work" (Dillard & Longman 1994:152).

Scholars and commentators see that there are two main theological themes that play important roles in the books of Kings: covenant and prophecy (Arnold & Beyer 1998:246-247; Bimson 1994:336-337; Dillard & Longman 1994:160-165; McConville 2005:629-632; Stuart 2002:92).

(Arnold & Beyer 1998:161-162; Dillard & Longman 1994:153). For detail discussion of the Deuteronomistic history, see Martin Noth, *The Deuteronomistic History* (1991); Frank Moore Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel* (1973:274-289); Richard Nelson, "The Anatomy of the book of Kings" (1981); Iain Provan, *Hezekiah and the Books of Kings* (1988). For the summary of the discussion, see Bill Arnold & Bryan Beyer, *Encountering the Old Testament: A Christian Survey* (1998:161-164); David M. Howard Jr., *An Introduction to the Old Testament Historical Books* (1993:179-182); Dillard & Longman, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (1994:153-156). As for the terms "deuteronomic" and "deuteronomistic", some scholars distinguish and define the terms differently. Paul Tanner explains, "Deuteronomic refers to the material found in the core of the book of Deuteronomy (Dt 5-28)" and Deuteronomistic refers to the writings, influenced by the Deuteronomic torah, that comprise the so-called Deuteronomistic History that extends from Joshua through II Kings" (Tanner 2000:24.3). However, Richard Boling explains that deuteronomic history refers "to a seventh-century historical work containing the bulk of Deuteronomy through II Kings" and deuteronomistic history refers "to the sixth century updating that provided the final edition" (Boling 1975:31).

Besides these themes, other themes that are also found in Kings can be understood under the rubric of the themes of covenant and prophecy. Certainly, the themes that are discussed below echo the themes of the deuteronomistic history (Stuart 2002:92).

5.9.2 Covenant

Based on the Mosaic covenant God made with the people in Deuteronomy, God committed to the covenantal relation with Israel (Bimson 1994:336). For the covenantal relation, God required Israel to worship Him at the central place He would choose. In the wilderness, Israel worshipped God "at a portable shrine", but as they enter the land, as God already commanded them so, they would go to the place that God would choose in order to worship Him (Dt 12:5-7). Besides this command of worship, God commanded them to destroy the places of the gods in the land (Dt 2-4). Centralized worship of YHWH was blended with Baal worship and marred by high places. After Israel entered the promised land (book of Joshua), they wavered between God and Baal and actually forsook God and served Baal. Thus, apostasy in Kings echoes the Baal worship in Judges (Stuart 2002:92). Israel was unfaithful to the covenant since entering the land.

The Kings of Israel (Solomon, Jeroboam, Rehoboam, Asa, etc.) built up high places and the people worshipped there (1 Ki 3:2-4; 11:7; 12:32-32; 13:2, 32-33; 14:23; 15:14; 22:43; 2 Ki 12:3; 14:4; 15:4; 15:35; 16:4; 17:9, 11, 29, 32; 21:3; 23:5) and this was what God forbade and he was displeased (Dillard & Longman 1994:163). Jeroboam's invention of idol worship by making people worship the two golden calves that he had made on high places (1 Ki 12:25-33) echoes[153] Aaron's making of the golden calf and letting the people worship it (Ex 32). Only kings Hezekiah and Joshiah destroyed the high places and made the worship right by being "faithful to the Jerusalem temple" (2 Ki 18:4, 22; 23:8-9, 13, 15, 19-20) (Dillard & Longman 1994:163).

Just as blessing and curse are proclaimed in Deuteronomy 28:15-68, if Israel is faithful and obedient to the covenant, she will be blessed and if unfaithful, cursed. The curses from God and the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile into Assyria and Babylon are based on "the so-called

[153] For a detailed explanation of God versus gods in the books of Ki and Israel's religion, see (McConville 2005:630-631).

retribution theology of Deuteronomy" (Arnold & Beyer 1998:246; Stuart 2002:92). After being unfaithful, what they expected from God was "promised curses" based on the Sinai covenant (Dt 28:15-68) (Stuart 2002:92). Thus, closely related to the theme of the covenant relation between God and Israel, themes of centralized worship of YHWH, retribution, blessings and curses permeate the book of the Kings.

5.9.3 Prophecy

The book of Kings is a "prophetic history"[154] because the word of God is "at work" throughout Kings (Arnold and Beyer 1998:247). The roles that the prophets Elijah, Elisha, Isaiah and other unnamed prophets play are significant because they are "bearers of the word of God" (McConville 2005:629). The prophets are the means by which God warned the wayward Israelites and that is the reason why God Himself called them "my prophets" (2 Ki 17:13, 23) (McConville 2005:629).

Throughout the book of Kings, there are many instances where the words of the prophets are fulfilled (1 Ki 13:1-2, 5, 21, 26, 32; 15:29; 2 Ki 1:17; 7:1; 9:26, 36, 10:17) and the fulfillment of the prophetic words, as Dillard and Longman assert, are an important theme (Dillard & Longman 1994:164). For example, Ahaziah, an evil king of Israel, dies (2 Ki 1:17) just as Elijah prophesied (1:4): "Now therefore thus says the Lord, You shall not come down from the bed to which you have gone up, but you shall surely die." Eventually, when Jerusalem was destroyed and the people of Judah were carried away to Babylon, God did not fail to "keep his word" but "he had done what he had warned the nation he would do" (Dillard & Longman 1994:164). Thus, God sent other nations: Babylon, Aram, Moab, and Ammon to punish and destroy His people

[154] As McConville explains, 2 Ki 18:1-20:21 is very similar to Is 36:1-39:8 in that both texts are about king Hezekiah's seeking God's help through the prophet Isaiah because of the attack of Sennacherib, king of Assyria (McConville 2005:629). In 2 Ki 18:6-7, Isaiah says, "Say to your master, 'Thus says the Lord: Do not be afraid because of the words that you have heard, with which the servants of the king of Assyria have reviled me. [7] Behold, I will put a spirit in him, so that he shall hear a rumor and return to his own land, and I will make him fall by the sword in his own land'" (ESV). In Is 36:6-7, Isaiah says, "Tell your master, 'This is what the Lord says: Do not be afraid of what you have heard—those words with which the underlings of the king of Assyria have blasphemed me. Listen! When he hears a certain report, I will make him want to return to his own country, and there I will have him cut down with the sword'" (ESV).

Judah according to what the prophets already warned (2 Ki 24:2) and according to what Moses at Mount Sinai warned with "the curses for covenant breaking" (Dt 28:15-68) (Dillard & Longman 1994:165). In short, the exile is the fulfillment of the curses for covenant breaking. The release of king Jehoiachin by Evil-Merodach, king of Babylon adumbrates the hope of release after the exile if the exiled people repent and return to God. Restoration might be possible only if the exiled repent and seek Him (Bimson 1994:337). Thus, closely related with the theme of prophecy, the themes of the fulfillment (efficacy) of the prophetic words, the roles of the prophets, and the words of God at work dominate the books of Kings. God who long used Aram to oppress Israel (both the Northern and Southern Kingdoms) eventually used Babylon as well when He punished and destroyed Judah.

As previously discussed, according to the Sinai covenant, God would react according to how the people would act: blessing for obedience and curse for disobedience. The books of Kings, from cover to cover, deal with how the Israelites, ever since entering the land of Canaan, were faithful to the covenant of God by breaking it and how they experienced punishments from God (Konkel 2006:19). The books of Kings are also known as part of the former "prophets" because they are interested in describing the Northern and Southern Kingdoms not chronologically but prophetically, focusing not on the mostly evil kings but on God and His covenantal relation with Israel (Barnes 2012:3; Brueggemann 2000:2; Konkel 2006:22).

5.10 Imprecation in the nearer contexts of 2 Kings 8:12

In 2 Kings 8:7-15, because of his sickness, Ben-Hadad, the king of Aram sent Hazael to Elisha in Damascus in order to ask God through Elisha whether Ben-Hadad would recover from his sickness (vv. 7-8). What Hazael heard from Elisha was something unexpected because besides the message for Ben-Hadad (even though he would recover, he would surely die), Elisha prophesied that Hazael would do great evil to Israel (v. 12). Just as Elisha spoke, Hazael murdered Ben-Hadad and became king of Aram (v. 15). When speaking to Hazael, Elisha knew that Hazael would "be the instrument of punishment to Israel" (1 Ki 19:15-17) and "war against Israel [would] be the inevitable outcome" (Konkel 2006:454).

The war that Hazael[155] would eventually wage against Israel are indeed dreadful (v. 12), "You will set their fortresses on fire … you will dash (רטש) their little ones (עולל) in pieces and rip open their pregnant women." This atrocious act of killing women and babies, as scholars note, constitutes a "military judgment sent by God, either for Israel or for foreign peoples" (Cogan & Tadmor 1988:91; Zenger 2005:519).

Hazael's oppression of Israel was so atrocious that even women and suckling babies[156] were to be killed. The prophetic message that Elisha spoke, as Cogan and Tadmor explain, indicates that God "controls the destiny of all nations, and in particular of Israel and its neighbor Aram," and the informal appointing of Hazael as the new Aramean king "set the stage for the decades of war between Aram-Damascus led by Hazael and Israel, under the House of Jehu" (cf. 10:32-33, 12:18, 13:22) (Cogan & Tadmor 1988:92). The emergence of Hazael as the new Syrian king was "the most serious Syrian threat to date to both Israel and Judah" and meant "political chaos in which Syria moved outward and eastward to threaten the borders of both Israel and Judah" (Hobbs 1985:106).

What is the purpose of the war and political chaos made by Hazael against Israel and Judah? What is the purpose of the narrative of the installation of Hazael? Why did God allow the threat against Israel and Judah? This has to do with the themes of 1-2 Kings, that is, apostasy, God's judgment and the exile. Because of the repeated apostasy of Israel and Judah, God made Hazael a threat to them.

The Elisha cycle (2 Ki 2:19-9:37) begins as Elisha succeeds Elijah (2:15-25) who is taken up to heaven by whirlwind (2:1). The Elisha cycle narrates his prophetic ministry (3:1-8:15). Elisha's witnessing Elijah being taken up to heaven (2 Ki 2:1-14) has theological significance for

[155] William Barnes explains Hazael's military career as follows, "This is the infamous Aramean usurper or, at least, commoner, well-attested in the Assyrian inscriptions. Hazael reigned some 40 years (a lengthy reign by contemporary standards). He applied increasing military pressure to Israel, Philistia, and Judah throughout his reign; he eventually annexed Gilead outright and almost certainly reduced Israel west of the Jordan River to nothing more than a vassal state. He also resisted repeated attacks from Shamanezer III of Assyria, who was able to besiege Damascus at one point, forcing Hazael to pay heavy tribute. Am 1:3-4, probably written a century after Hazael's reign, typifies both the mighty power and the notorious cruelty of king Hazael (cf. the horrific litany of atrocities in 2 Ki 8:12)" (Barnes 2012:245).

[156] For the extrabiblical evidence of how babies and women get killed during war, Cogan and Tadmor refer to a "hymn to the middle Assyrian monarch Tiglath-pileser I" (Cogan & Tadmor 1988:91; Cogan 1983:755-757).

understanding Elijah's ministry and his succeeding Elijah (2:15-25). Elisha and his fellow prophets already knew about the departure of Elijah, which "demonstrated the power and mystery of God" (vv. 3, 5), and Elisha's request for "a double portion" of Elijah's spirit on himself "reflects the inheritance-right of a firstborn son (Dt. 21:17)" (Bimson 1994:364). This is the reason Elisha called Elijah "my father" (v. 12) and why Elisha wanted to make certain he was ready for prophetic ministry as Elijah's heir (Bimson 1994:364).

The places Elijah went according to 2 Kings:1-6 before being taken up to heaven have theological significance in terms of Israel's past. First, Gilgal (v. 1) is the place where the Israelites stopped after crossing the Jordan (Jos 3-4), where the males were circumcised and where they celebrated the Passover (Jos 5:2-9); second, Bethel ('house of God') (v. 2) is where Jacob met and wrestled with God (Gn 32); third, Jericho (v. 4) is the place where Joshua and the Israelites' first battle took place in their conquest of Canaan (Jos 5-6); fourth, Jordan (v. 6) is where the Israelites miraculously crossed over into the land (Jos 3) (Bimson 1994:363).

Besides the theological significance of the places, the roles of Elijah and Elisha have also theological significance in connection with Israel's earlier history. There are parallels between the relations of Elijah-Elisha and Moses-Joshua (Bimson 1994:363). There are similarities between the succession of Moses by Joshua and the succession of Elijah by Elisha. In the process of succession to be the next leader of the Israelites, while Moses laid his hands on Joshua (Dt 34:9), Elijah gave his mantle (אדרת) to Elijah (2 Ki 2:13-14). The similarity is also found in the names of the prophets. Through Moses, God revealed His name, "I AM THAT I AM (Ex 3:14)" and Elijah's name means, "YHWH is God." As for the successors, Joshua's name means "YHWH is salvation" and Elisha's, "my God is salvation", and these two showed the work of God's salvation throughout their respective prophetic ministries. For these reasons, Elisha is called the second Moses; Elijah is "in the mould of Joshua" (Bimson 1994:364). Most significantly, Moses was the prophet who mediated between God and the Israelites when God made the covenant at Sinai/Horeb and Elijah was the prophet who brought the Israelites back to the covenant relationship with God (Bimson 1994:363-364). The people acknowledged Joshua and Elisha as the true successors of Moses and Elijah respectively.

The purpose of Elijah and Elisha's ministries was to turn the people from idolatry and Baal worship (1 Ki 18) (Konkel 2006:447). They follow in the pattern of Moses, who pleaded with God for the people who committed idolatry (Ex 32) and warned them that if they would perform idolatry in the land, God would punish them (Dt 4:25-31). Yet, they also follow in the pattern of Joshua, who warned the people of idolatry in his farewell speech (Jos 23:1-16). Through the prophecy of Elisha, God's people Israel probably knew how severe God's punishment would be. Despite the message of God's prophets, they continued to disobey. Israel's accumulated sin had resulted in the Babylonian captivity in 586 BC (2 Ki 25) and they cryed out to God for restoration with their Imprecatory Prayer (Ps 137).

5.11 Imprecation in the broader context of 2 Kings 8:12

The history (narrative) of 1-2 Kings is a continuation of 1-2 Samuel and the books of Kings and Samuel can even viewed as one work because 1 Kings 1 begins, "Now, king David was old and advanced in years" (v. 1) (Konkel 2006:19). Moreover, the "ascension of Solomon" in the beginning of 1 Kings can be understood as "a continuation of the story of David's reign" (Konkel 2006:19).

The narratives in the former prophets (Jos-2 Ki) are not presented in a straightforwardly chronological order, but former prophets do unfold the narratives in close connection with "God's judgment on political events from Conquest to Exile" (Konkel 2006:20). In the book of Joshua,[157] God gives Israel all the land that He swore to give to their fathers (Jos 21:43). In the book of Judges, after the death of Joshua, the Israelites begin to forsake YHWH and become Canaanized by worshipping Baal in Canaan, and God punishes them by sending enemies against them (Jdg 2:11-15). In the books of 1-2 Samuel, because of the sin of David against Bathsheba, the sword never departs from David's kingdom (2 Sm 12:10).

Just as the previous books of the former prophets emphasize Israel's apostasy and God's judgment, the books of Kings "follows the same pattern of emphasizing those events that were

[157] The books of 1-2 Ki are a continuation of the book of Jos in the sense that Israel settled down in the promised land and God granted them a monarchy in which they were required to keep the commandments of God (Arnold & Beyer 1998:222).

critical in the destiny of the nation" (Konkel 2006:21). Eventually, 2 Kings ends with the narrative of the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile into Babylon (2 Ki 25). The Jerusalem temple and its destruction is one of the main themes that plays an important role in 1-2 Kings. The Jerusalem temple built by king Solomon as narrated in 1 Kings 6 is destroyed in 2 Kings 25.

Each king of Israel is evaluated on the basis of the deuteronomistic covenant that God made with the people at Sinai. They are judged based on whether each was loyal to the covenant because loyalty to the covenant is "the key to everything" (1 Ki 15:26, 34; 2 Ki 15:9, 18, 24, 28) (Stuart 2002:92); "He [Nadab the son of Jeroboam] did what was evil in the sight of the Lord and walked in the way of his father, and in his sin which he made Israel sin" (15:26).

Like the previous kings, the last king of Israel, Hoshea did "evil in the sight of the LORD" (17:2). Because of the accumulated sins of idolatry, God made Shalmaneser, King of Assyria invade Israel, capture it and carry king Hoshea and the Israelites away into Assyria (vv. 3-6). 2 Kings 17:7-23 is what Bimson calls a "theological summary of Israel's history" (Bimson 1994:376) and narrates the reason why God punished the northern kingdom and sent them into exile, namely, because of idolatry and disloyalty to the covenant. The narrator emphasizes Israel's covenantal relationship with God since the Exodus: "Now this came about because the sons of Israel had sinned against the Lord their God, who had brought them up from the land of Egypt from under the hand of Pharaoh, king of Egypt, and they had feared other gods and walked in the customs of the nations whom the Lord had driven out before the sons of Israel, and in the customs of the kings of Israel which they had introduced" (vv. 7-8, NASB). Verse 13 is reminiscent of the ministries of the prophets including Elijah and Elisha who warned Israel of doing evil and not keeping the commandments of God.

However, the narrator has Judah in mind in this theological summary of Israel. Just as there was a warning against Israel, there is warning against Judah as well (v. 13). God warned by sending prophets to both Israel and Judah (v. 13). Just as Israel did not keep the commandments of God and worshipped idols, Judah also did evil (v. 19). For these reasons, when God is said to remove his people "out of his sight" (vv. 18, 20), it means that they would be removed from the land and carried away into exile. Verses 18-20 indicate that the judgment of God's removal from the land

certainly includes Israel and Judah as well (Bimson 1994:377). Thus, 2 Kings 17 anticipates the fall and the exile of Judah.

So, Judah was left alone. In contrast to the Kingdom of Israel, in which there were only evil kings, the narrative focuses on two good kings of Judah in its final years: Hezekiah (chs. 18-20) and Josiah (chs. 22-23), and even these two kings are evaluated "on the basis of covenant loyalty (18:5-6; 22:11; 23:1-3)" (Bimson 1994:378, 382; Stuart 2002:97); both of the kings kept the commandments of God.

Specifically, Hezekiah removed all the high places, cut down pillars and Asherah poles and kept "the commandments that the Lord commanded Moses" (18:6). However, despite his loyalty to the covenant, the prophecy of the fall of Judah at the hand of Babylonians was announced (20:12-21). Josiah, another righteous king like Hezekiah, carried out religious reforms and celebrated the Passover (ch. 23). However, despite the reform, the exile into Babylon was unavoidable (Bimson 1994:386).

Because of the accumulated sins of Judah with an emphasis on sins of king Manasseh, during the reign of Jehoiakim, who did evil, God sent king Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon along with his allies: the Arameans, Moabites, and Ammonites to invade and destroy Judah (24:1-4) (Bimson 1994:384). During the reign of Jehoiachin, who did evil as well, king Nebuchadnezzar besieged Jerusalem, took everything from the city and led away Jehoiachin with all the people into Babylon (ch. 24:8-20) (Bimson 1994:384). The Jerusalem temple was destroyed (ch. 25:8-21). However, it is worth noting how 2 Kings concludes concerning the dilapidated state of Jerusalem. Second Kings concludes with a message of hope that king Evil-merodach of Babylon released Jehoiachin and showed kindness to him (vv. 27-30) (Stuart 2002:98). Why do the books of Kings include the message of the release of Jehoiachin? The narrative tries to deliver the message that even though the people failed to keep the covenant and forsook God, God never fails His people because of the covenant He has made with them. The ending "promises return from exile for those who return to Yahweh (Dt 30:1-10)" (Stuart 2002:98).

The hope adumbrated in the form of the release of Jehoiachin in 2 Kings does not appear in Psalm 137. The psalmist simply laments hoping that God would restore exiled Judah and Jerusalem.

5.12 Imprecation in the canonical context of the Former Prophets

The former prophets show "canonical affinities" with one another because of the theology of the deuteronomistic history that dominates them (McConville 2005:634; Richter 2002:219; Tiemeyer 2005:674). There is a certain pattern of "theological sequencing of covenant making and covenant breach, covenant renewal and restoration" (McConville 2012:345). Beginning with Deuteronomy 28 with its lists blessings and curses, the deuteronomistic history has as its main theme "retribution". The future destiny of Israel depends on how they behave; if they disobey, God will punish them particularly by withdrawing the gift of the promised land (Arnold & Beyer 1998:147). The Sinai covenant of Deuteronomy requires "Israel's uncompromising loyalty" to God (Stuart 2002:57). Standing on the verge of entering the promised land at the end of Deuteronomy, Israel was under the obligation to keep the commands of the covenant faithfully.

As the opening book of the deuteronomistic history, the book of Joshua "is intended to be prophetic, in the sense that it records Israel's history with the purpose of instructing and explaining from the divine perspective how and why things went the way they did" (Stuart 2002:57). The book of Joshua contains the story of Israel's entering the promised land under the leadership of Joshua in accordance with the Sinai covenant of deuteronomy (Dallaire 2005:836-848). The importance of keeping the law of the covenant is emphasized at the beginning of book of Joshua, "This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success" (1:8, ESV). This emphasis of keeping the law is a reminder of what has been spoken by Moses at the end of Deuteronomy, "Take this Book of the Law and put it by the side of the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God, that it may be there for a witness against you" (31:26). Joshua concludes with the covenant renewal (24:1-27), where Joshua commands Israel to fear and serve God only by getting rid of other gods (vv. 14-15). If they disobey God by breaking the covenant, the consequence would be

God's judgment upon them: God "will bring disaster on you and make an end of you!" (v. 20). Their response was a positive one, "But we will serve the Lord" (v. 21). In fact, the promises made to Abraham especially in terms of the land is first fulfilled in the book of Joshua (Dallaire 2005:817).

Contrary to Joshua's command and Israel's positive response, the people began to go astray from God and break the covenant after the death of Joshua by not driving out the Canaanites (Jdg 1:21, 27-36). The consequence of their disobedience was from what they had not done – the Canaanites became "thorns" in their sides and "their gods" became "a snare" to them (2:3) (Stuart 2002:71). Just like the book of Joshua, the book of Judges is all about the covenantal relationship between God and Israel. Judges shows in many ways that the covenant between God and Israel is both unconditional and conditional (Dillard & Longman 1994:127). It is unconditional because the covenant that God made with Abraham was unconditional (Gn 12, 15, 17). It is conditional because Israel has to faithfully keep the covenant established at Mount Sinai and it is renewed again and again. Because of this ambivalent nature of the covenant, Judges involves the tension that God "will not remove his favor, but Israel must live in obedience and faith to inherit the promise" (Dillard & Longman 1994:127).

There is a cycle[158] of apostasy – oppression – cry – deliverance in Judges (Younger 2002:35). The first apostasy committed is breaking the covenant by not completely driving out the Canaanites (1:27-36), which in turn would lead to the worship of the Canaanite dieties (Baals and Asherah). Judges is "prophetic" in nature in the sense that "the voice of God in the dual modes of warning and promise" can be discerned (Boda 2012:1046). God, who warns Israel because of her disobedience and sin, also provides deliverance by sending the judges (Boda 2012:1046). However, God's deliverance for Israel "lasted only until they rebelled again (cf. Jdg 2:10-19; Ne 9:24-29)" (Youngblood 2012:25). The means by which God punishes Israel is war – sending the enemy nations against them (1:14). The Israelites cannot fight back because "the hand of the Lord was against them" (v. 14). It is when the Israelites repent and cry out to God

[158] Despite some disagreement among scholars, Lawson Younger sees that there are eight components in each cycle: "1) Israel does evil in the eyes of Yahweh. 2) Yahweh gives/sells them into the hands of oppressors. 3) Israel serves the oppressor for X years. 4) Israel cries out to Yahweh. 5) Yahweh raises up a deliverer (i.e., judge). 6) The Spirit of Yahweh is upon the deliverer. 7) The oppressor is subdued (reversal of component 2). 8) The land has 'rest' for X years" (Younger 2002:35).

that God restores them by the judges whom He raises up as deliverers (v. 16). However, after the judges die, the people soon turned aside from God and serve other gods. Because there is no king they do "what is right in their own eyes (17:6; 21:25). Thus, each narrative in Judges is based on the cycle of sin-punishment-repentance-deliverance. It can be seen that the deuteronomic influence of retribution is dominant in the book of Judges.

The book of Samuel is deuteronomistic because Israel had a king just as Deuteronomy "envisaged" (Dt 17:14; 1 Sm 8:5, 20) (Dillard & Longman 1994:145). The kings of Israel were expected to keep God's commands, but the first king, Saul did evil and God rejected him as the king (1 Sm 15). Just like in Judges, the strong retributive theme of Deuteronomy 28 is pervasive in Samuel (1 Sm 12:15). God's choosing Jerusalem to be the center of YHWH worship is also deuteronomistic. Jerusalem is significant because it is the only place where God is worshipped. The last chapter of 2 Samuel narrates how David bought a place in Jerusalem where the temple of Solomon would eventually be built (Youngblood 2012:31).

God's act of "electing or choosing" throughout 1-2 Samuel also relates to the deuteronomistic point of view (Martin 1984:309; Youngblood 2012:31). God chose Israel and delivered her out of Egypt and he also chooses Jerusalem as His place of worship. God likewise also elects Samuel (1 Sa 1:19-20), Saul (10:20-24) and David (16:6-13) as the leaders of Israel. However, 1-2 Samuel shows a "reversal of fortune" for Israel. God also deserts Israel if she disobeys and this theme is expressed specifically in the Song of Hannah (1 Sm 2:6-8) (Youngblood 2012:31). Eventually, God rejects the stubborn Israel by bringing disaster on the Jerusalem temple. The books of Kings, the last of the deuteronomistic history, are "the culmination of the OT's primary history" which begins with Genesis and runs all the way through to the fall of Jerusalem (McConville 2005:623). Kings show the culmination of Israel's continuous failure to keep the covenant and the consequences of that failure.

The main theme of the Former Prophets, retribution, shows how the Jews had been unfaithful to God and that the Jerusalem temple was destroyed and the Jews were taken into exile in Babylon. The Babylonian exile is the reason why the psalmist in company with the exiled Jews laments to God in Psalm 137, "By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down and wept, when we remembered

Zion" (v. 1). The lament of the psalmist shows the severe nature of God's judgment against Judah.

5.13 Psalm 137 in light of 2 Kings 8:12 and the Former Prophets

Based on the previous discussion of the themes of 2 Kings and the (nearer and broader) literary context of 2 Kings 8:12, this section interprets the imprecation of the Psalm 137. This section focuses on the imprecation and judgment that fell on Israel because the main theological theme of the deuteronomistic history is the curse on Israel for her covenant unfaithfulness leading to foreign invasion and exile.

The psalmist's words of exilic pathos in Psalm 137 echo Elisha's prophecy concerning Hazael's evil deeds against Israel. Likewise, Elisha's prophecy in 2 Kings 8:7-15 foreshadows the exile of Israel in the psalm. Based on the discussion above, Israel's repeated apostasy (beginning especially from the era of the judges) was the reason for Hazael becoming God's instrument of judgment against Israel in 2 Kings 8 and the Babylonian exile in Psalm 137. God used many nations as the instruments of judgment and as the Psalm 137 shows, Babylon, which was probably the worst enemy of Israel, was the instrument of judgment as well.

When reading Psalm 137 in light of 2 Kings 8, 1-2 Kings and the rest of the former prophets, we are able to understand the reason why the psalmist and the exiled people sat down by the rivers in Babylon, wept and remembered Zion (Ps 137:1), and why he eventually spoke out the vengeful and imprecatory prayer against his enemies, especially against Babylon (vv. 8-9). God warned Israel by Moses and various prophets for a long time. Despite the warnings, Israel's disobedience continued and eventually God raised up Babylon to destroy Jerusalem. The destruction took place in 587 BCE and that is the reason why the exiled people lament in the Psalm. The judgment from God against God's people was inevitable.

As 1-2 Kings (specifically 2 Ki 8:7-15), show, Elisha's prophecy was that Israel would be oppressed during Hazael's reign, and eventually Israel was defeated by Tiglath-Pileser, King of Assyria and deported to Assyria (2 Ki 15:29). After the fall of Samaria to Assyria, Judah fell to

Babylon (2 Ki 25). Because of the sins of both kingdoms the books of Kings demonstrate "how it was that God destroyed his own people and sent them into exile" (Bimson 1994:336). The main purpose of Kings is to "justify God's terrible decision by showing that the kings of Israel and Judah, almost without exception, were hopelessly flawed" (Bimson 1994:336). Thus, God's punishment of Israel was forewarned through prophets over a long period of time. As the former prophets indicate, the repeated apostasy of Israel eventually led to the fall of the two kingdoms: first Israel by Assyria and then Judah by Babylon respectively.

The way that God punished His people was involving the death of the infants. God's people living in exile in Psalm 137 is the fulfillment of the prophets' prophecies. By reading Psalm 137 in light of 2 Kings 8:7-15, the atrocious nature of babies being killed can be understood because the way that the babies are killed takes place during war, where there is no age limit to who might die. According to Elisha's prophetic oracle, the way that Hazael would oppress Israel would be by means of war – dashing babies and ripping open pregnant women. In light of this, in the psalmist's imprecatory prayer in which the Babylonians' infants should be dashed against the rock, the psalmist refers to a curse that would occur during war. The psalmist prayed that God would punish his enemy, the Babylonians, in the way that they destroyed Judah (Ps 137:8). In short, the psalmist seeks retribution from God against Babylon (v. 8).

However, the books of Kings do not mention any "hope" for God's people about "what may lie beyond exile" (Bimson 1994:336). Only the imprecation is spoken out by the psalmist with the hope that his vengeful prayer would be answered, "O Daughter of Babylon, doomed to be devastated, blessed will be the one who repays you with the recompense with which you have done to us! Blessed will be the one who takes and dashes your little ones against the Rock!" (Ps 137:8-9).

The psalmist cries to God for vengeance against the Babylonians. The psalmist wants the Babylonians to go through what he and his fellow exiled people went through – the death of infants during war. In order to see hope beyond the exile, it is necessary to turn to other parts of the Old Testament where such hope is expressed, such as the prophetic books. The study now turns to Isaiah and Jeremiah.

5.14 Imprecation in Isaiah 13:15-18 and Jeremiah 51:20-24

Both Isaiah 13:15-18 and Jeremiah 51:20-24 deal with the enemies of Judah especially Babylon. Both passages have the following elements in common with each other and with Psalm 137: 1) both passages have almost the identical expression of killing little children. 2) Both texts contain the judgment of Babylon. 3) Both texts (and/or their near and far contexts) contain the sins of Babylon. 4) Both texts (and/or their near and far contexts) contain the restoration of exiled Judah. 5) Both judgmental messages against Babylon in Isaiah 13 and Jeremiah 51 are certainly reminiscent of the imprecatory prayer of Psalm 137. These themes of Isaiah 13 and Jeremiah 51 help to interpret Psalm 137 because the judgment on Babylon and the restoration of Judah are what the psalmist of Psalm 137 seeks from God through his Imprecatory Prayer.

Thus, in order to read Psalm 137 in light of these two passages, this section first deals with the themes that hold Isaiah and Jeremiah together as a whole canonical unit respectively, and then examines Isaiah 13:15-18 and Jeremiah 51:20-24 respectively by analyzing each text in its nearer and broader literary contexts in order to see how Isaiah and Jeremiah speak of the imprecation of Psalm 137. Here are the imprecations uttered by the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah in the passages respectively. The prophet Isaiah writes, "Their (the Babylonians') infants will be dashed in pieces before their eyes" (v. 16a). Similarly, the prophet Jeremiah writes, "with you I will dash old man and youth, and with you I will dash young men and young women" (51:22bc).

5.15 Theological themes of Isaiah

Because this study seeks to solve the difficult nature of the imprecation against Babylon in Psalm 137, this section specifically focuses on the themes related to the imprecation and judgment against Babylon found in the book of Isaiah. Chapter 3 has shown the theme of judgment against Babylon by means of cursing is one of the main themes of Psalm 137. However, it has been discussed that because Psalm 137 *per se* does not show specifically how the psalmist's imprecatory prayer against Babylon would be granted by God, this chapter brings Psalm 137 into dialogue with the Old Testament passages that contain imprecation against Babylon.

5.15.1 God as Holy One of Israel

In Isaiah 6 the vision that Isaiah sees in the temple is the fullness of God's holiness, to which the seraphim react, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts! The whole earth is filled with his glory!" (Is 6:3). As commentators and scholars note, this theme plays an important role throughout the book of Isaiah (Baltzer 2001:37; Koole 1997:39; Walker 2005:14). As Jan Koole correctly explains, "the Holy One of Israel (קדוש ישראל)," [159] a characteristic of God, "sums up everything he (Isaiah the prophet) can say about Yahweh (in his vision in Is 6), his infinite exaltedness and immaculate perfection, his will to make himself known in judgment and in salvation to his people and then to the world" (Koole 1997:39). God as "Holy One of Israel", which indicates his "absolute otherness", requires Israel to be holy by getting rid of idols and other gods on the basis of the Sinai covenant (Ex 19:6) (Stuart 2002:175). Despite the requirement of God and the prophetic ministry of Isaiah, God's people, Israel was disobedient to God and failed to become a "holy nation" and thus was eventually carried away into exile. God as the Holy One of Israel is also a God of judgment. The judgment against Israel and the exile were ordained and inevitable (6:11-13). The "ordained" and "inevitable" judgment that appears in Isaiah 13-24 is already announced in Isaiah 6 (Williamson 2006:1). In this way, Isaiah 6, which depicts God as the "Holy One of Israel", plays an important role throughout the book of Isaiah (Williamson 2006:1).

5.15.2 Judgment against the nations

The book of Isaiah is replete with the theme of judgment against the nations. The objects of God's judgments are all the nations including God's people: Israel and Judah (Is 1-12, 28-33) and other nations (Is 13-24, 46-48). The first prophecy of the oracle against the nations (OAN) (Is 13-24) concerns Babylon (Is 13:1-14:24). This prophecy against Babylon reappears in the OAN (Is 21:1-10) and in the message of Israel's restoration (46:1-47:15). God judges Judah because Judah disobeyed and broke the covenant of God; God judges Babylon because of the evil things that Babylon did to Judah and for the sake of Judah's restoration. However, as Koole explains, the judgment against other nations has to be considered in connection with "the weal

[159] The expression, "the holy one of Israel (קדוש ישראל)" appears 30 times in Isaiah but only 6 times in the rest of Old Testament (Stuart 2002:175).

and woe of Zion" (Koole 1997:41) because the judgment against the nations (especially against Babylon) leads to the restoration of Judah. The book of Isaiah is "entirely dominated" by the themes of judgment and restoration (Koole 1997:41).

5.15.3 Hope and restoration of Judah

As the name of the prophet Isaiah, "YHWH will save" or "YHWH is salvation" reflects God's nature, salvation is an overarching theme that dominates the book of Isaiah (Baltzer 2001:37; Koole 1997:5; Williamson 2006:12). As the name indicates, readers of Isaiah can at least expect a positive and hopeful message for the Israelites who just heard the message of judgment and who are experiencing judgment (Grogan 2005:450). The Holy One of Israel is able to save and redeem His people (41:14; 43:3, 14; 47:4; 48:17; 49:7; 54:5). God will set the exile free (51:14).

The exodus motif that was reiterated by Moses several times in Deuteronomy in order to remind the Israelites of God's act of delivering them out of Egypt (Dt 7:8; 9:26; 13:5; 15:15; 24:18) is reiterated by Isaiah in order to give the people of Israel who are experiencing the Babylonian captivity hope that the same God will deliver them out of Babylon and restore them (e.g., 1:27; 29:22; 35:9; 41; 43:1, 14; 44:6, 22-24; 47:4; 48:17, 20; 49:7; 51:10) (Dillard & Longman 1994:277). The message of hope for restoration of Israel symbolizes "the continuity of God's special protection" which was once discontinued during the exile after the destruction of Jerusalem (Berlin 2005:84).

The restoration of Judah will take place as God destroys Babylon (Is 47:4-15). As a consequence of the destruction, the Babylonians will experience the death of their infants (Is 13:16) and loss of their children (Is 47:9). Furthermore, another enemy of Judah cursed by the psalmist of Psalm 137:9 ("Remember, O Lord, against the the Edomites the day of Jerusalem!") is portrayed as a nation which will suffer the judgment of God ('the sword of YHWH') (Is 34:5; Ps 137:7) (Beuken 2000:284-287).

The themes of Isaiah, furthermore, play a significant role in interpreting the "imprecation" theme of Psalm 137. The psalmist's Imprecatory Prayer that God would destroy Babylon also appears

in the prophetic words of Isaiah. The prophet Isaiah utters the message of the restoration of Judah through the judgment of Babylon.

5.16 Theological themes of Jeremiah

It has been discussed that the theological themes of Isaiah begin with the theme of God as the Holy One of Israel and all other themes develop around that theme. However, the book of Jeremiah seems to more straightforward in terms of themes and it narrows down the themes by focusing on the theme of judgments against Judah/Jerusalem and the foreign nations and the future hope of Judah (Stuart 2002:186). Because of the unfaithfulness of Judah to the covenant of God, God warned them through the prophet Jeremiah and eventually punished them by destroying Jerusalem. However, based on the promises that God made in Deuteronomy, God would restore them by renewing their hearts and making a new covenant (Stuart 2002:186). The whole message of Jeremiah is twofold: the message for Jeremiah's own age and for the "future generations" and "especially those in exile" (Thompson 1980:107).

Concerning the theological themes of book of Jeremiah, Dillard and Longman say that the themes can be found and formed in the relationship Jeremiah had with God and with the people of Judah. This is because Jeremiah was called to deliver the messages that he received from God to the people, specifically against the "rule of Josiah's three sons and a grandson, the last four rulers of Judah" (Dillard & Longman 19994:285, 297).

5.16.1 God as YHWH over all nations.

The theme of God's control over the nations permeates the book of Jeremiah (Thompson 1980:108). Because God is the Lord over Israel and the nations, Jeremiah is the prophet to all the nations (1:4, 10). Babylon, the greatest enemy of God's people is God's servant into whose hands God gives all the nations (Edom, Moab, Ammon, Tyre and Sidon, and even Judea) (Jr 27:6) (Lundbom 1999:144; Thompson 1980:108). For Jeremiah, God, who created the world, also judges it and throws it into total chaos (4:23-26; 18:1-11).

The God of Jeremiah is the God who "chooses" Israel. God reminds Israel through the prophet Jeremiah how God has chosen her forefathers and made the covenant with them (Jr 2:2-3, 21; 3:14; 12:7-10; 13:17; 33:24). The blessings and curses of Mount Sinai were still valid for them as they were for their forefathers (11:26-32; 22:9; cf. Dt 27-28) (Harrison 1973:38). God shows "fundamental commitment to Israel as a covenant nation" (Allen 2012:437). Correspondingly, Israel as the chosen nation by God was supposed to keep the Torah in order to maintain the covenant relation with God (Jr 11:3-5). Israel, ever since the covenant was established, from generation to generation, was required to keep the covenant that God made with their forefathers, but they failed to keep it (Allen 2012:437). Through Jeremiah, God tells them to ask of "the ancient paths where the good way is so that they might walk in it," but they did not walk in it (Jr 6:16). Thus, God's judgment upon Judah is impending.

5.16.2 Judgment against the nations.

The theme of judgment against the nations, one of the main themes in Isaiah, is picked up by Jeremiah. In Jeremiah, the nations that were once instruments of judgment against God's people are now under the judgment of God (Jr 51:6-8, 20-24). The judgment against God's own people and other nations shows the sovereignty of God over all creation and all nations (51:15-19).

The disobedience of God's people – from those of Moses' generation to those of Jeremiah's generation – was "chronic (Jr 2:20; 3:25; 22:21; 32:30-31)", "deep-seated (Jr 5:3; 13:23; 17:1)" and came "to a head in Jeremiah's period (Jr 3:11; 7:26; 16:12)" through social injustice and pagan worship (Allen 2012:437). They refused to repent and rejected both God and Jeremiah and rather accepted the words of false prophets who said that God would never reject His people despite their "social injustice" and "pagan worship" (Jr 6:12-14; 23:9-32; 27:14-18; 28:1-4; 29:24-32)" (Allen 2012:437).

In the end, God uses a foreign nation, Babylon, to punish his own people Judah (Lundbom 1999:147). However, the foreign nations that were once used as instruments of judgment against Judah are likewise to be judged for their sins: pride, arrogance and trusting in idols (Jr 46:8;

46:25-26; 48:29; 49:4; 49:16; 50:31-32). No nation can escape God's judgment because God is "God over the whole earth" (Lundbom 1999:148).

5.16.3 Hope and restoration of Judah

The theme of the restoration of Judah in Isaiah is picked up by Jeremiah. Like the prophet Isaiah, the prophet Jeremiah, who speaks a message of judgment, speaks also a message of hope and restoration (Lundbom 1999:148).[160] The restoration of Judah will take place as God begins to punish hostile nations (Jr 50-51). Jeremiah 50:18-19 reads, "Therefore, thus says the Lord. Behold, I'm bringing punishment on the king of Babylon and his land, and I will restore Israel to his pasture." Through Jeremiah God said that after the exile in Babylon is complete, God would gather them from all the nations, visit them, restore them and their fortunes, and would be available whenever they find Him (Jr 29:10-14) (Thompson 1980:113).

In the light of the message of hope and restoration in Jeremiah, it is certain that the psalmist's imprecatory prayer in Psalm 137 will be answered and Babylon will be punished by God so that Judah will be restored.

5.17 Imprecation in the nearer context of Isaiah 13:15-18

Isaiah 13:1-23:18 lists a series of oracles/prophecies against nations (Koole 1997:6). Babylon is the first nation on the list. The harshest word against the infants is the oracle (משא) against Babylon that the prophet Isaiah saw (חזה) (Is 13:2-22, 14:3-23).[161] 13:2-5 indicate that the oracle prophecies that God will lift a "banner" which might symbolize that God will "exececute judgment" on all nations (Grogan 2005:559-560). Then, in verses 6-8 the prophet Isaiah commands, "wail (הילילו)" because the dreadful day of the Lord (יום יהוה) is near that will be a day of judgment for all nations (Grogan 2005:560). In verses 9-13, the prophet, according to the oracle he saw, says that the target of God's impending judgment is expanded from "the land

[160] The message of restoration in found in the passages of the New Covenant (Jr 31:31-34) and the messianic hope (23:5-6; 33:15-16) (Thompson 1980:113).
[161] For the structural outline of this passage, see (Grogan 2005:465). As for the explanation of "oracle concerning Babylon", see (Grogan 2005:553-555).

(הארץ)" to "the world (תבל)" (Grogan 2005:560-561). Verses 14-16 describe the thoroughness of the judgment against Babylon. In verses 17-22, God will use the Medes as the instrument of judgment against Babylon.

In 14:1-2, the restoration of Jacob/Israel is announced. Verse 1 says, "The Lord will have compassion on Jacob, and again choose Israel, and settle them in their own land, the aliens (הגר) will join them and attach themselves to the house of Jacob."[162] The taunt that Israel makes against Babylon in verses 3-4a (introduction) and verses 22-23 (conclusion) will be reaffirmed when Babylon is destroyed and Israel is restored. In verses 4b-11, Isaiah prophesies that the king of Babylon (his name is not specifically mentioned), the oppressor (נשג) will be taunted by the Israel's remnant (v. 4bc) as the Lord punishes him (v. 5). The oppressor will cease to exist (v. 4b) and surely Sheol (NIV: grave; NLT: the place of the dead) will meet him (v. 9). In verses 12-17, the king of Babylon is portrayed as "the morning star, the son of the dawn (הילל בן שחר)" whom scholars understand as a satanic figure who attempted to go even "above the stars of God (אל לכוכבי)"[163] but falls from heaven (Grogan 2005:565). Thus, the final destination of the king of Babylon who wanted to be in the highest point is the lowest point, that is, Sheol/grave/the place of the dead. In verses 18-21, Isaiah continues to prophesy that unlike other kings of the earth who died in glory and were buried in graves, the king of Babylon will be left dead, slain by the sword, not buried in the grave.

5.18 Imprecation in the nearer context of Jeremiah 51:20-24

Jeremiah 51:20-24 is part of the oracle against Babylon in Jeremiah 50-51. Jeremiah 50:2-3 are "the announcement of Babylon's fall" (Brown 2005:66), "Babylon is taken! … a nation has come up against her (Babylon), which shall make her land a desolation, and none shall dwell in it; both man and beast shall flee away" (vv. 2-3). Then "a word of comfort" to the exiled Judean people follows the message of judgment.

[162] This announcement is reminiscent of God's promises to Abraham in Gn 12, according to which God will make Abraham's descendants numerous and the people of the earth blessed through him. Moreover, as Grogan explains, throughout the Old Testament, there are instances where the Gentiles join Israel, for example, Jethro and Rahab, and they find "a place within the covenant of God with Israel" (Grogan 2005:563).

[163] As Grogan notes, this is a reminder of the Tower of Babel (Gn 11:1-9) and Satan's first attempt to have "equal status with God" by deceiving Adam and Eve in order to "reproduce in human life his own proud aspiration" (Gn 3) (Grogan 2005:565).

Jeremiah 50-51 declares judgment on Babylon but also the restoration of exiled Judah (50:17-20) (Thompson 1980:731). It should be noted that the oracle concerning Babylon is the last and longest prophecy compared to other oracles against nations (Thompson 1980:731-732). This passage has "a specific historical setting": those days when Israel will return and Babylon will be punished (vv. 4, 20) (Brown 2005:534). The destroyer of Babylon might be the Medes (the enemies from the north) rather than Persia (geographically, from the east) (Thompson 1980:733). Moreover, Isaiah 51:11 says that God will "stir up" the Medes in order to destroy Babylon as "vengeance for his (God's) temple" (Fretheim 2002:625). However, it could be Persia or both the Medes and Persia because the "north" in the Bible does not necessarily indicate any geographic location. As Harrison notes, "For the Hebrews, *the north* was the location from which anything sinister originated, and hence it was used colloquially rather than as a specific geographical location on many occasions" (Harrison 1973:184).

In the series of messages of the judgment against Babylon, a message of hope is heard; however, the message is not for Babylon, but for Israel. God is furious about the evil deeds that Babylon did to Israel. In 50:17-20, Jeremiah says,

> Israel is a hunted sheep driven away by lions. First the king of Assyria devoured him, and now Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon broke his bones. Therefore, thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Behold, I am about to punish the king of Babylon and his land, as I punished the king of Assyria. I will restore (= return) Israel to its pasture and it shall feed on Carmel and in Bashan, and his desire shall be satisfied on the hills of Ephraim and in Gilead. In those days and at that time, says the Lord, the iniquity of Israel shall be sought, and there shall be none, and the sins of Judah, and none shall be found, for I will forgive those whom I have spared (vv. 17-20).

5.19 Imprecation in the broader context of Isaiah 13:15-18

Isaiah 13-14 contains the oracle against Babylon, and Isaiah 13-14 is part of chapters 13-27, the collection of ten oracles against the nations surrounding Judah.[164] Isaiah 13-27 belongs to the

[164] Isaiah 13-28 is subdivided into two parts: chapters 13-23 and 24-27: God's judgment on the nations beginning with Babylon and God's triumph over the nations (also often known as the "apocalypse of Isaiah") (Oswalt 1986:62-63, 440). The oracles/prophecies are against Babylon (13:1-14:23), against Assyria (14:24-27), against Philistia (14:28-32), against Moab (15:1-16:14), against Damascus (and Ephraim) (17:1-14), against Cush (18:1-7), against Egypt (19:1-25), against Babylon (21:1-10), against Edom (21:11-12), against Arabia (21:13-17), against Jerusalem (22:1-25), and against Tyre (23:1-18) (Grogan 2005:465). Isaiah 24-27 forms another series related to the previous two sets of oracles. Isaiah 24 forms an "inclusion on the topic of world overthrow" (1-3, 17-20) (Motyer 1993:132).

first part of Isaiah chapter 1-39. Isaiah 1-39 focuses on the judgment of Israel (Walker 2005:168). Isaiah 1:1-12:6 by and large contains a series of "oracles concerning Judah and Jerusalem" (Grogan 2005:465). Isaiah begins with the corrupt and sinful condition of God's people (1:1-31). Then, the prophet speaks of the mountain of God that would eventually be established (2:1-5) and the day of the Lord, meaning the impending judgment on Judah and Jerusalem (2:6-5:30) (Walker 2005:16). Then, chapter 6 describes Isaiah's vision and the call of the Holy One to become a prophet to Judah and Jerusalem.

Isaiah 7:1-12:6 is known as "the book of Immanuel" in which God promises to give a "promised son" through a virgin (v. 14) to Ahaz who was afraid of the Syro-Ephramite alliance (Kidner 1994:638; Stuart 2002:179). Oracles of judgment are announced on behalf of the southern kingdom against the northern kingdom (9:8-10:4), which allied with Assyria against Judah (10:5-19) (Stuart 2002:179). Then, specifically the messages of hope for Judah are announced. The perfect messianic king would be established (10:20-11:16). This section concludes with a joyous song of salvation (12:1-6), then follows the collection of ten oracles against the nations, including Judah (Is 13-27). After the oracles against nations (chs. 13-27), judgment oracles against Israel and Judah, both the northern and southern kingdom who once trusted in Egypt (ch. 30), are announced (28:1-33:24).

In Isaiah 34:1-35:10, two oracles are announced. The first oracle is against all the nations (34:1-17) and the second oracle concerns the restoration of God's people (35:1-10). Then, Isaiah 36:1-39:8, known as the "historical interlude" (which is repeated in 2 Ki 18:13, 17-20:19), narrates how God delivered Jerusalem from Sennacherib of Assyria (Walker 2005:143, 145). This section also declares that Hezekiah is "condemned[165] for glorying in wealth and human patronage" by showing "all the treasures and resources" to the Babylonian envoys and that Jerusalem would eventually be destroyed by Babylon (Kidner 1994:655; Walker 2005:163).

The theme of "the Lord's war and victory" that begins in Isaiah 24 reappears and concludes in Isaiah 27, showing that the whole world is under God's judgment (Motyer 1993:133).

[165] Is 39:6-7 read, "Behold, the days are coming, when all that is in your house, and that which your fathers have stored up till this day, will be carried to Babylon; nothing will be left, says the Lord. And some of your sons, who will come from you, whom you will beget, will be taken away, and they will be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon."

In contrast to the first part, the second part of Isaiah (Is 40-66) focuses on the "comfort and restoration" of Israel (Walker 2005:168). In Isaiah 40-48, message of comfort and deliverance for God's people is announced. Images of exile and the theme of the "second-exodus" are dominant, Jerusalem's "hard service is ended" and "her iniquity is pardoned" (40:2), which, as Stuarts notes, indicates the end of the exile (Stuart 2002:182). This is the comfort and consolation (40:12-41:29) to Zion (40:1) because YHWH God has spoken the good news (40:9-11). Throughout Isaiah 41:1-44:23, God is depicted as the creator of all things and the Comforter of Israel (Walker 2005:168).

The way that God will restore and comfort Israel is by raising up a chosen servant, Cyrus (45:1). This anointed servant, Cyrus will destroy Babylon and Israel will experience the second exodus (ch 45) (Kidner 1994:655). In Isaiah 46:1-47:15, the destruction of Babylon is actually announced (Stuart 2002:183). The prophecy of Isaiah shifts back to stubborn Israel showing how Israel has been unfaithful to God (48:1-22). Then, Israel is urged to leave Babylon because judgment on Babylon is impending and "the Lord has redeemed his servant Jacob" (48:20-22).

In Isaiah 49:1-55:13, the message of salvation is announced for Israel's sake. The servant God will raise up for his people, is Israel (49:1-50:11) (Kidner 1994:661). God's servant, Israel will become the servant who will bring Israel and the nations back to God (Stuart (49:1-7) (Stuart 2002:183). This servant of God will be the servant not only for Israel but also the other nations throughout the world. In Isaiah 49:1-52:12, reconciliation between God and Israel is proclaimed. Isaiah 52:13-53:12 shows how the reconciliation will be accomplished, namely, by the suffering of the servant. Isaiah 54:1-17 addresses the "glorious future of Zion" by echoing the former three covenants: Abraham (vv. 1-3), Sinai (vv. 4-8) and Noah (9-10) (Stuart 2002:184). Israel will indeed be restored by means of the suffering servant. In Isaiah 55:1-13, the final remark invites Israel and the nations to come to the Lord who abundantly offers salvation, "Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters" (v. 1). God will make an everlasting covenant with them if they return to Him (v. 3).

Isaiah 56-66, the last section of Isaiah synthesizes the previous sections and then focuses on the future glory of Jerusalem (Goldingay 2014:3; Grogan 2005:814). Isaiah 7-39 commands the

people to live the righteous life by obeying the covenant with the warning of destruction if they fail (Grogan 2005:814). Isaiah 40-55 focuses on the salvation that will be available for the exiled people in Babylon (Grogan 2005:814). Isaiah 56 begins by revisiting the themes of Isaiah 1 – themes of God's salvation that would soon to come on Israel (vv. 1-8) (Stuart 2002:184). The oracles found in Isaiah 56-66 pick up the various previous themes showing Israel's inability to become holy due to her idolatry (56:9-57:13). The redeemer from God (59:20-21) will bring salvation to Israel (59:16-21), which echoes Isaiah 1:18-20 (Stuart 2002:184). Then, Isaiah 60:1-63:6 emphasizes the glorious future of Zion and God's Anointed One. Truly, this Anointed One will bring salvation to Israel and glory to Zion. Isaiah 63:7-65:16 shows that God will eventually appear to avenge and redeem Israel. This section begins by recalling the first exodus, "according to all that the Lord has granted us and the great goodness to the house of Israel that he has granted them according to his compassion, according to the abundance of his steadfast love" (v. 7 ESV). And then, the book of Isaiah concludes with the final judgment and the future glory of Zion (65:17-66:24).

In many ways, the book of Isaiah shows the themes of Psalm 137 – curse and judgment upon Babylon and the restoration of Judah. The curse that the psalmist of Psalm 137 expresses also appears in the prophetic words of Isaiah.

5.20 Imprecation in the broader context of Jeremiah 51:20-24

The oracle against the Babylon (Jr 50-51) is the last of the "Oracles against the Nations (OAN)" that begin at Jeremiah 46 (Lalleman 2013:686). Jeremiah 46:1 functions as the superscription ("The word of the Lord that came to Jeremiah, the prophet concerning the nations") to the oracles in Jeremiah 46-51. Even the OAN in Jeremiah 46-51 forms an *inclusio* with the call of Jeremiah in Jeremiah 1, "See, today I appoint you over nations and over kingdoms to pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant" (v. 10) (Lalleman 2013:687). Moreover, Jeremiah is a prophet over Judah as well. The oracles of Jeremiah concerning Judah are found especially Jeremiah 26-45. Just like all the nations, the people of Judah are under God's judgment as well. Jeremiah, the prophet had messages not only for the people of his own generation, but also for the future exiled people. Babylon, which was the

means of judgment especially against Egypt (Jr 46), became the object of God's judgment as well (Jr 50-51). The nations that are listed (Egypt, Philistines, Moab, Ammon, Edom, Damascus, Kedar and Hazor, Elam and finally Babylon) are to be punished by God in order that Judah would be saved (McConville 1994:704).

Jeremiah 1 functions as the prologue to Jeremiah. In this first chapter Jeremiah is called to be a prophet over the nations. The oracles throughout the book of Jeremiah took place, as Jeremiah 1 indicates, during the reign of Josiah, Jehoiakim and Zedekiah until the exile of Jerusalem. Specifically, the oracles found in Jeremiah 2-20 concern Judah's sins and punishment during the reign of Josiah. God will bring judgment against the apostate Israel. These oracles show how Israel broke the covenant God made with her forefathers (11:1-15). An oracle of restoration is also announced; Israel will experience a "second exodus" (16:14-15).

The focus of the oracles shift to the unrighteous Judean kings (Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim and Jehoiachin) (21:1-22:30) and the false prophets (23:9-40; 26:1-29:32). In the midst of the oracles concerning the Judean leaders, a judgment oracle against the nations is announced in Jeremiah 25:15-38. In this oracle, all the nations listed starting from Egypt till Babylon will drink the God's cup of wrath (Lalleman 2013:300). This theme of God's judgment against the nations reappears in detail in Jeremiah 46:1-51:64. The following Isaiah 30:1-33:26 is known as the book of consolation or comfort (Lalleman 2013:67; Thompson 1980:128). This section shows Israel and Judah will be restored and a new covenant will be established between God and Israel (31:35-37). After the message of comfort, a message of judgment is announced against kings Zedekiah and Jehoiakim. Babylon will attack and lay siege to Jerusalem (34:1-39:18). In Isaiah 39, it is portrayed that Jerusalem is actually placed under siege and destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon during the reign of Zedekiah (39:1-2).

Jeremiah 40:1-45:5 contains the narrative of the fall of Jerusalem and its aftermath and Jeremiah's last oracles concerning the exile. After the fall, Jeremiah warns that the remnant of Judah should not trust Egypt nor flee to it (Brown 2005:65; Freitheim 2002:21). However, they resisted God's warning and fled to Egypt and eventually Babylon destroyed Egypt. The destruction of Egypt along with the remnant of Judah took place according to God's words that

came to Jeremiah concerning "all the Jews living in the land of Egypt" (44:1). Then, the following passage, known as the oracle against the nations, shows the nations beginning with Egypt become the target of God's judgment (46-51). The nations Egypt, the Philistines, Moab, Amon, Edom, Damascus, Kedar and Hazor, Elam and finally Babylon will be judged. It is worth noting that Babylon, was once used as the tool for God's judgment on Egypt, becomes also the object of God's judgment. While there are messages of judgment against the nations, there is a message of hope and restoration for Israel (chs. 46:27-28; 50:1-10, 17-20; 51:34-40, 49-53). God judges the nations in order to deliver Israel. The book of Jeremiah concludes by recounting the fall of Jerusalem (ch. 52). Jeremiah ends with a "glimpse of hope", in that Jehoiachin King of Judah is released by Evil-merodach king of Babylon (Lalleman 2013:68).

5.21 Imprecation in the canonical context of the Latter Prophets

Just like the other canonical Old Testament books, the latter prophets show "canonical affinities" with each other and with the book of Deuteronomy because the themes of Israel's covenant breaking and God's judgment and restoration are dominant throughout the latter prophets (McConville 2012:345). The latter prophets, part of the Prophets (the *Nevi'im*) contain Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and the Twelve. The role the prophets played was to challenge idolatrous Israel who continuously failed to worship YHWH only. Northern (Elijah, Elisha, Am and Hs) and southern (Jl, Is, Mi, Jr, Zph and Hab) prophets in the divided kingdoms challenged the people of Israel and Judah for a long time. Just as previously discussed, the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah warned against Judah and prophesied the fall of Jerusalem. The prophet Jeremiah actually witnessed the fall of Jerusalem. However, just as previously seen, there was a message of hope and restoration beyond the message of judgment through the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah.

The book of Ezekiel, basically set during the exile in the 6th century BCE, echoes the themes of Isaiah and Jeremiah, especially the themes of the fall of Jerusalem and Babylonian captivity (Renz 2008:229). Because of Judah's unfaithfulness and failure to keep the covenant, the "covenant curse" came upon Judah in the form of the exile (Duguid 1999:229-230). The oracles against the nations (OAN) in Ezekiel 25-32 are reminiscent of the OAN in Isaiah 13-23 and

Jeremiah 46-51, in which God punishes the surrounding nations as God restores Judah (Duguid 1999:229).

5.22 Psalm 137 in light of Isaiah 13:15-18, Jeremiah 51:20-24 and the Latter Prophets

Based on the earlier discussion of the theological themes of Isaiah and Jeremiah and the literary context of Isaiah and Jeremiah, this section interprets the psalmist's imprecation in Psalm 137. This section focuses on the imprecation and judgment that falls on Babylon, Judah's greatest enemy (a nation of the OAN) and the hope and restoration of Judah. In this way, the difficult nature of the psalmist's imprecation will be understood.

In many ways, the Imprecatory Words ("remember against"; "doomed to be devastated"; "repays you with the recompese with which you have done to us"; "takes and dashes your little ones against the rock".) found in Psalm 137:7-9 echo the prophetic words of the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah. The psalmist's harsh words and plea for the judgment against Babylon and Edom are found in the words of the prophets Isaiah 13:15-18 ("Their infants will be dashed in pieces before their eyes".) and Jeremiah 51:20-24 ("with you I break in pieces the old man and youth; with you I break in pieces the young man and young woman"; "I will repay Babylon".). The basis of the psalmist's imprecations against Babylon and Edom are certainly found in the prophetic words. Moreover, the entirety of the books of Isaiah and Jeremiah seem to provide a clue to the reason for the Babylonian captivity of God's people and the psalmist's harsh imprecation.

Reading Isaiah 13 and Jeremiah 51 (or the entire book of each, respectively) reminds the reader of Psalm 137 that Israel's enemy, Babylon keeps receiving the negative message of judgment (as if the prayer of the psalmist is answered) from the prophets Isaiah (13:1-14:23; 21:1-10) and Jeremiah (50:1-51:64). Reading Psalm 137 in light of Isaiah 13 and Jeremiah 51 will make clearer the difficult nature of imprecatory prayers. Faced with this problem of the difficult nature of the imprecatory prayer, the reader of Psalm 137 is reminded by the books of Isaiah and Jeremiah (and the rest of the latter prophets) not to read the psalm in isolation. The psalmist's imprecatory prayer is so harsh that his prayer does not seem to be answered. Moreover, just as

the psalm indicates, his lamenting prayer in Babylon, a foreign land, never seems to be answered. Because God's judgment on Judah through Babylon was very real, so harsh, so thorough, so dreadful that restoration seems impossible; all the psalmist can do is to weep, remember Zion (137:1) and curse Babylon, praying to God (vv. 8-9).

The recurring theme of OAN, that is, the judgmental declarations on Babylon in the books of Isaiah and Jeremiah reminds of the reader of Psalm 137 that the psalmist's curse is not something personal and hateful. But the curse is something that has to be considered in connection with the prophecies found in Isaiah and Jeremiah. Read in isolation, the imprecatory prayer does not seem appropriate. However, once read in connection with Isaiah 13:15-18 and Jeremiah 51:20-24, the difficult nature of imprecatory prayer begins to disappear. Read in isolation, Psalm 137 can lead the reader into great confusion that eventually results in unsatisfactory answers proposed by various scholars as seen in chapter 2 of this study.

How does reading Psalm 137 in light of Isaiah and Jeremiah deal with the psalmist's cursing words? Before we answer this question, it needs to be remembered that just as the lament features in Psalm 137 (and regularly in the whole *Psalter*), they also features in the books of Isaiah and Jeremiah. The lament that the psalmist and the exiled people lamented in Psalm 137 is the same lament that the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah lamented about in the books of Isaiah and Jeremiah. The event of the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile were certainly tragic for the psalmist and also for the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah. Just as Isaiah (3, 29, 49-55) and Jeremiah (11-12, 15, 17-18, 20) lamented,[166] the psalmist lamented (137:1-6).

Based on Isaiah 13 and Jeremiah 51, what the psalmist meant by his imprecatory words is that the curse on his enemy, Babylon would take place not on a personal level, but on a national level by means of vengeful war in the way that he and the nation Judah went through. This is because the expression, "dashing the infants against rock" is found elsewhere (Isaiah 13, Jeremiah 51) in passages that deal with God's judgment on any nations that did evil. Psalm 137 is full of the

[166] Isaiah'ꜱ laments are: "and her (Zion) gates will lament and mourn" (3:26);" "Yet I will besiege Ariel (the city where David settled); she will mourn and lament" (29:2); "she will mourn and lament "The Lord has forsaken me, and the Lord has forgotten me (49:14)". Jeremiah's laments are: "How long will the land mourn and the grass of every field wither?" (12:4); "Why is my pain perpetual, my wound incurable, refusing to be healed?" (15:18); "For wheneve I speak, I cry out, I shout, 'Violence and destruction! (20:8)".

language of war that is also found in Jeremiah 50-51. The words are בת לבב ("daughter Babylon") (Ps 137:8; Jr 51:33), שדד ("devastate") (Ps 137:8; Jr 51:2), שלם ("repay") (Ps 137:8; Jr 51:24, 56), גמל ("do") (Ps 137:8; Jr 51:6), and נפץ ("destroy") (Ps 137:9; Jr 51:20-23). Thus, especially Psalm 137:8-9 is thematically connected with Jeremiah 50-51 and the two passages share a common perspective (Zenger 2005:520). Zenger's comment on this is quite helpful, "The proclamations of the judgment and destruction Babylon in Jeremiah 50-51 (especially 51:6, 20-26, 49-50, 55-56) must also be adduced in an interpretation of vv. 7-9. It is probable that Ps 137:8-9 was inspired by Jeremiah 50-51" (Zenger 2005:520). Thus, the message of the judgment and destruction of Babylon in Isaiah 13 and Jeremiah 50-51 can be adduced to interpret the psalmist's imprecation against Babylon in Psalm 137:7-9.

The psalmist was probably well informed of messages of judgment and destruction of Babylon in Jeremiah 50-51 and went on to utter the Imprecatory Prayer just as written in the psalm. Thus, when reading Psalm 137 especially in light of Isaiah 13 and Jeremiah 50-51, the reader becomes aware that the idea that Babylon will be judged and destroyed is not based so much on the palmist's imprecations but on the prophetic words of God's judgment and destruction. In light of Isaiah 13 and Jeremiah 50-51, those who are judged and punished are not only infants. Those who are likewise punished will include all ages of people; no one will be able to escape God's impending judgment. Isaiah 13 and Jeremiah 50-51 show that all age ranges of people will undergo God's punishment and perish. However, Psalm 137:8-9 shows that specifically the infants of Babylon will be killed. The reason why specifically the infants of Babylon will be killed is that "the royal house in Babylon" will be discontinued by their death (Zenger 2005:518). The theme of the death of Babylon's little children in Psalm 137:8-9 is also found in Isaiah 47:1-15; "These two things shall come to you, in a moment, in one day, the loss of children and widowhood shall come upon you in full measure (v. 9ab)."

The psalmist's curse contains the theme of retaliation, saying that blessed is anyone who performs retaliation (שלם) for what Babylon did to Israel (גמל, גמול) (Ps 137:8). Isaiah 13:17 reads that the Medes will arise to attack Babylon and will not show "mercy to babies" or pity on children." Isaiah 14:3-8 can function as the answer to the psalmist's Imprecatory Lament,

> The Lord will give the people of Israel relief from their pain and suffering and from the hard work they were forced to do. When he does this, they are to mock the king of Babylon and say: "The cruel king has fallen! He will never oppress anyone again! The Lord has ended the power of the evil rulers who angrily oppressed the peoples and never stopped persecuting the nations they had conquered. Now at last the whole world enjoys rest and peace, and everyone sings for joy. The cypress trees and the cedars of Lebanon rejoice over the fallen king, because there is no one to cut them down, now that he is gone!" (ESV)

Thus, the prayer of the psalmist is in accordance with God's words of promise in the prophetic words of Isaiah and Jeremiah. All the words of the ceasing of pain and suffering, restoration, the fall and destruction of Babylon, enjoyment of rest and peace, the songs for joy, first, allude to God's word through the prophet Isaiah. Very likely already knowing these words of hope, the psalmist spoke out the imprecatory lament. The psalmist spoke out the imprecation because it alludes to God's word.

5.23 Imprecation in Hosea 14:1

Another passage that contains the curse of killing babies is found in Hosea 14:1 [Eng 13:16], which says, "Samaria will be held guilty, because she has rebelled against her God. They will fall by the sword. The little ones will be dashed in pieces, and their pregnant women will be ripped open." From the curse spoken by Hosea, it seems the Northern Kingdom will encounter the judgment of God because of her sin. The book of Hosea deals with God's covenantal relation with the northern kingdom. Hosea expresses that God will show unfailing love and compassion to Israel even though He has to punish her because of her sin (Stuart 2002:211). As the prophet's name means "salvation," God will certainly show His compassion and will save Israel even after punishing her at the hands of Assyria (Hs 10:6-7; 11:1-11). God's covenantal relation with Israel is symbolized in Hosea's marriage to Gomer in order to show how unfaithful Israel is (Hs 1). The book of Hosea contains the oracles of judgment against Israel and concludes with a plea to return to the Lord and a message of future blessing for Israel (Hs 14). Hosea, was called by God probably during the reign of Jeroboam II[167] to declare destruction and exile to Israel who had

[167] Dillard and Longman explain concerning the historical period of Hosea's ministry, "Hosea's prophetic ministry began probably late in the reigns of Jeroboam II in the north and Uzziah in the south and ended early in Hezekiah's rule of the south. The beginning of his ministry accordingly took place during a period of expansion and prosperity in both orth and south" (Dillard & Longman 1994:355). For detailed information on historical background of book

been unfaithful and apostate to God and to the covenant for long time (Stuart 1987:9). Hosea's ministry begins with God's command that Hosea marry Gomer the prostitute to show how unfaithful Israel is.

5.24 Theological themes of Hosea

5.24.1 Covenant

The theological themes of Hosea revolve around the theme of Israel's covenant failure (Carroll 2008:222). Throughout the book, the prophet Hosea emphasizes the fact that God had made a covenant with Abraham and his descendants to be His people and how Israel had broken the covenant (Butterworth 1994:765). The prophet refers back to the past events of Israel's early history, especially the Exodus "when God brought Israel out of Egypt and made them into his people" (e.g., 2:15; 9:10; 11:1-4) (Butterworth 1994:765). Thus, the oracles of Hosea are based on the Mosaic covenant made on Mount Sinai (Dearman 2010:50-53; Wolff 1974:xxix). Stuart correctly says, "Understanding the message of the book of Hosea depends upon understanding the Sinai covenant. The book contains a series of blessings and curses announced for Israel by God through Hosea. Each blessing or curse is based upon a corresponding type in the Mosaic law" (Stuart 1987:6-7). Stuart indicates how Hosea's speeches depend on the curses of the Sinai covenant (Stuart 1987:6-7). One of the examples[168] Stuart provides is that the judgment speech of Hosea 4:10-11a is based on the curses found in Deuteronomy 28:17-19 and 32:24-28.

In connection with the covenant relationship between God and Israel in Hosea, the concept of the knowledge of God needs to be given attention (4:1). In Hosea, Israel's relation with God is expressed as having the knowledge of Him. Israel is commanded to know God, but fails to know him. Rather, Israel forgot him, which is a "fundamental failure" (McConville 2012:34). The lack of knowledge of God is the "spirit of harlotry" (McConville 2012:345). The problem was that

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of Hs, see (Butterworth 1994:764-765; Dillard & Longman 1994:355-356; McConville 2012:341-342; Stuart 1987:9-11).

[168] Stuart shows how Hosea's oracles that cover the five stages of the history of Israel depend on Deuteronomy 4:20-31 and the five stages are: 1) "the exodus-wilderness stage (Hs 2:16-17)" and 2) "the making of the covenant with its blessings and curses, by which Israel and Yahweh are bound", 3) "the period of blessings (Dt 28:2-14; Hs 2:4-15 [2-13])", 4) "the period of curses (Hs 3:4-5; 4:6; 5:7; 7:16; 8:13-14; 9:3, 17; 10:15; 11:5-6; 13:16; etc.)," 5) "the period of eschatological blessing (2:1-3 [1:10-2:1]; 2:16-25 [14-23]; 3:5; 6:1-3; 10:12; 11:8-11; 14:1-8)" (Stuart 1987:7-8).

Israel did not seek to know God but actually forget Him (2:13; 13:6). The people are destroyed because of their lack of knowledge of God (4:6). Instead of having the knowledge of God, Israel sought to know Baal by worshipping him (Hs 2). Certainly, knowing God by worshipping Him only and rejecting idolatry echoes the "OT traditions of law, covenant and commandment" and this fits "firmly in the context of the first commandment" (Ex 20:3) (McConville 2012:345).

The book of Hosea portrays Israel's unfaithful relation with God with a marital metaphor[169]: God as husband and Israel as unfaithful wife. This metaphor is "the framework for Hosea's whole message" (McConville 2012:345; Nogalski 2011:28). Moreover, the book of Hosea (5:6) shows that "the spirit of harlotry" in Israel's heart was due to Israel's lack of knowledge of God (McConville 2012:345). Because of the lack of knowledge, Israel is doomed to be destroyed (Hs 4:6). In order to show and emphasize Israel's infidelity to God, God commands Hosea to marry Gomer, a prostitute. Hosea's marriage shows the broken relation between God and Israel and that Israel "will experience judgment because they have broken the covenant (6:7; 8:1)" (Stuart 1987:360). Hosea's marriage shows that just as his marriage with Gomer has failed, Israel's relationship with God has failed too and gets worse and worse because of her infidelity (6:10; 7:4; 9:1) (Arnold & Beyer 1998:441; Dillard & Longman 1994:361). This marital image in Hosea is "intended to dramatize the relationship between God and Israel" (Patterson 2008:7). Just as Gomer is unfaithful to Hosea, Israel is unfaithful to God.

The theme of Israel's unfaithfulness to God in Hosea shows how all God's people – Israel and Judah – failed to keep the covenant. Just as Judah was unfaithful, so was Israel. As previously discussed, this theme permeates the former and latter prophets. Because of their sin, Israel and Judah came under the judgment of God.

[169] The relationship between God and Israel are portrayed by Hosea the prophet with various metaphors and similes: God as "a husband (Israel as the wife; 2:2-20); a father (Israel as a son; 11:1-11); as a healer (healing the sick Israel; 5:13; 6:1-2; 7:1; 14:4); and as a fowler (with Israel as the birds caught in his net; 7:12; 9:11); a lion (5:14), a leopard and a bear (13:7-8); dew (14:5); the winter and spring rains (6:3); a green pine tree 14:8 and even moth and rot (5:12). Israel as a heifer (4:16; 10:11), a vine and wine (10:1; 14:7), grapes and figs (9:10), a lily, and olive tree and a cedar of Lebanon (14:5-6), an unwise unborn son (13:13), a cake not turned over (7:8), a faulty bow (7:16), and morning mist, chaff and smoke (13:3)" (Butterworth 1994:765-766).

5.24.2 Judgment and salvation

Because the people of Israel have no knowledge of God and reject Him (5:13; 7:1; 11:3; 14:4) and rather seek to know Baal and worship him (2:2-23), they are under the judgment of God and are to be destroyed (4:1-3, 6). Because of a lack of knowledge, as the name of the third child of Hosea, Not-My-People (לא-עמי), indicates, Israel is being rejected and judged by God (Butterworth 1994:765). Moreover, Hosea 2:2 shows that God rejects Israel as his wife, "She is not my wife, and I am not her husband." Becoming "like the gods they worship" and not knowing God were "the reason for the coming judgment" (Stuart 2002:213).

In the controversy with Baal in Hosea 2, even though it was God who cared for Israel and provided everything she needed, because of her sins of playing the harlot with Baal, now God is taking away the land and its bounty from her (2:8-9) (Butterworth 1994:768). It was God who delivered Israel from Egypt (11:1; 13:4) and cared for her by providing everything she needed: the land and its bounty. However, Israel did not acknowledge God for all the possession she had, but rather boasted of herself and said, "In all my labors, they cannot find in me iniquity or sin" (12:8) (Butterworth 1994:777). Thus, God judges them by depriving them of all that they have: the land and its bounty. Taking away the land from Israel means sending her away into the wilderness (2:15) and even to Egypt from where they once went out (Hs 8:13) – the exile (McConville 2012:347). These are the "powerful images of reversal of the history of salvation" (McConville 2012:347). Returning to Egypt should not be taken literally in Hosea because Egypt stands in parallel to Assyria (6:11; 9:3; 11:5) to indicate "Assyria as captor and enslaver". It also recalls the "return to Egypt" is a "forbidden route for the people that once was taken from slavery there into the freedom of service to Yahweh (Dt 17:16)" (McConville 2012:347). Egypt stands parallel to Assyria in order to indicate that both of them are worldly powers "opposed to Yahweh and his project in Israel" and they oppress Israel as the instruments of judgment against Israel (McConville 2012:348).

However, Hosea does not stop at the messages of judgment but goes beyond to the messages of hope. Even though God has to punish and judge Israel, He will not leave them in exile forever, but he will certainly restore them and let them experience "a second exodus" (2:14-15) (Dillard

& Longman 1994:362). Thus, two things are certain: judgment and salvation – even though judgment has to come against Israel, God's love will prevail (Arnold & Beyer 1998:441). As the basic message of Hosea is God's love for Israel as husband and wife, God will heal her and will make her "into what he had intended her to be all along – his own beautiful bride" (Arnold & Beyer 1998:441).

It has previously been discussed that the books of Isaiah and Jeremiah depict the all-inclusive nature of God's judgment; any nation that does evil (Israel, Judah, Babylon, Egypt and so on) becomes a target of God's judgment. The book of Hosea specifically indicates Israel becomes a target of God's judgment. Because of her covenant-breaking sin, Samaria was destroyed by the Assyrians and its survivors were taken captive into Assyria in 722 BCE. Likewise, because of her unfaithfulness to the covenant, Jerusalem was destroyed by the Babylonians and its survivors were taken captive into Babylon in 586 BCE.

5.25 Imprecation in the nearer context of Hosea 14:1

The imprecation of the death of little children found in Hosea 14:1 [Eng 13:16] is part of the second prophetic oracle (Hs 13:1-4:1 [Eng 13:16]. The oracle deals with God's anger against His people Israel because of their sins against God described in 11:12-12:14. Thus, the nearer context, Hosea 12:1-14:1 [Eng 11:12-13:16], is divided into two sections of oracles: 11:12-12:14 and 13:1-16 (Macintosh 1997:518; Stuart 2002:216). In the first, themes in connection with the broken covenant relation between God and Israel appear: the sins of Israel (Baal and idol worship in v. 2, lies and deceit in v. 12) and the judgment of God (12:2, 14). In this oracle, Hosea reminds wayward Israel of the faithfulness that God had showed to their forefathers: first to Jacob and then through God meeting Jacob at Bethel after Jacob wrestled with the angel and sought His favor (11:3-6) and then later when God delivered Israel out of the land of Egypt through Moses (12:13) (Butterworth 1994:778).

The second section of oracles (13:1-16) likewise contains the theme of the sins of Israel, especially the sin of Israel's idol worship (vv. 1-2, 6, 9-12, 16) (Butterworth 1994:778; Wolff 1974:222). Because of the sins, judgment from God is about to come against Israel (vv. 3, 7-8,

15-16). However, in the midst of the messages of sin and judgment, the restoration of Israel is adumbrated by Hosea's prophecy. Hosea 13:14 says, "I shall ransom them from the power of Sheol. I shall redeem them from Death. O Death, where are your plagues? O Sheol, where are your sting? Compassion is hidden from my eyes (ESV)."

As was indicated with discussions on the books of Isaiah and Jeremiah, where there is a message of judgment, there is also a message of hope. This message of hope in v. 14 certainly provides a clue as to how book of Hosea would conclude – with a message of hope and restoration (14:1-9) (Arnold & Beyer 1998:443). In light of these contexts, the curse that involves the infants being dashed in pieces and the pregnant women ripped open is the judgment of God stored up for Israel because of all the sins Israel has ever committed.

5.26 Imprecation in the broader context of Hosea 14:1

Scholars and commentators generally agree that beginning with the superscription (1:1), the book of Hosea is divided into three parts: 1) 1:2-3:5 ("Hosea's troubled marriage reflects God's relationship with Israel"), 2) 4:1-11:11 ("First Prophetic Cycle of judgment and restoration), and 3) 11:12-14:8 ("Second Prophetic Cycle of judgment and restoration") (Butterworth 1994:766; Dearman 2010:146, 294; Stuart 1987:8). After 1:1, the superscription[170] of Hosea, Hosea 1:2-3:5 shows what the message of Hosea would be like through Hosea's marriage with Gomer, which symbolizes God's covenant relation with Israel (Butterworth 1994:767). It is worth noting that while Hosea 1 and 3 are historical narratives of Hosea's married life with his unfaithful and adulterous wife, Gomer, Hosea 2 is poetry that describes the "unfaithfulness and adultery" of God's wife, Israel (Evans 2008:245). Thus, the narrative of Hosea 1 and 3 shows recalcitrant Israel in an analogous way.

In this narrative of Hosea's marriage God's judgment and restoration are announced. Just as Hosea's marriage with Gomer is the symbolical indication of God's broken relation with Israel,

[170] The verse shows during which kings the prophet had his prophetic ministry: from Uzziah (760 BCE) to the reign of Jeroboam II (793-753 BCE). However, despite this indication of the period of Hosea's ministry, Butterworth suggests not taking it "too literally" because "it includes some narrative which sets the actual prophecies in their context (chs. 1, 3)" (Butterworth 1994:764, 767).

so are the meaning of the names of Hosea's three children; Jezreel ("God will punish the house of Jehu and will put an end to the kingdom of Israel"), *lo-ruhamah* ("I will no longer have compassion on the house of Israel, to forgive them") and *lo-ammi* ("not my people! I am not your God!") (1:4-9). After the message of judgment through the names of children of Hosea and Gomer, the message of restoration is announced (1:10-11, 2:1). Not only Israel but also Judah will have compassion and restoration from God (v. 10). One day, they will be "*ammi* (my people)" and "*ruhama* (received mercy)" (2:1) though once they were "*lo-ammi* (not my people)" and "*lo-ruhama* (not received mercy)" (1:6, 9).

Then, God continues to rebuke Israel through Hosea's children (2:2-23). Because of Israel's idolatry (2:2-6), the prophecy of judgment is announced against Israel (v. 13). The message of restoration follows the message of judgment (vv. 14-23). The way that God will restore Israel is by making a covenant with her (v. 18). The message of restoration, once again, is symbolized by Hosea's marriage (3:1-5). Hosea's taking Gomer as his wife against symbolizes God's restoration of Israel (Patterson 2008:9).

Just as Hosea reclaims Gomer as his wife, God will reclaim Israel as His wife. On that day, the children of Israel will "return and seek" the Lord their God (v. 5). The themes of judgment and hope as an "alternating pattern" reappear in the rest of Hosea, 4:1-14:9 (Butterworth 1994:766). Roughly 4:1-14:9 can be divided into two parts: 4:1-10:15 (the prophecy of judgment) and 11:1-14:9 (the prophecy of restoration) (Carroll 2008:225). Just as 1:1-3:5 show God's judgment against Israel due to her infidelity with the image of Hosea's marriage to Gomer, it is not surprising at all to see what the following chapters (4:1-14:9) are all about.

Hosea 4 begins with God's contention with Israel (vv. 1-3). The following prophecies throughout the rest of the Hosea, just as Patterson mentions, contain "an interplay between divine and prophetic oracles" (Patterson 2008:8). The following are the oracles spoken by God Himself, "What shall I do with you, O Ephraim? What shall I do with you, O Judah?" (6:4). "How can I give you, O Ephraim? How can I hand you over, O Israel?" (11:8). "O Ephraim, what more have I to do with idols?" (Patterson 2008:8). In addition to the divine oracles, Hosea speaks out various oracles of judgment in Hosea 4-14.

The message of judgment is conveyed by Hosea, but Hosea also gives Israel a message of hope and restoration. This message begins as Hosea calls Israel to repent and return to God (6:1-3; 14:1-3). If they repent and return, God will heal and restore them (14:4-8). Then, the book of Hosea is concluded with a subscription that challenges Israel with a wisdom saying, "Whoever is wise, let him understand these things whoever is discerning, let him know them. For the ways of the Lord are right, And the righteous will walk in them, but transgressors will stumble in them" (v. 9 ESV).

The literary context of Hosea indicates the message of the impending divine judgment and restoration for Israel.[171] The book of Hosea shows how God deals with his wayward and sinful people. The way that God punishes them (Israel and Judah) is severe and total, involving the death of infants in the context of war with a foreign nation (Assyria and Babylon respectively) and captivity into a foreign land.

5.27 Imprecation in Nahum 3:10

The last instance of the infants being dashed is found in Nahum 3:10, which is part of a woe-oracle (משא) against Nineveh, the capital of Assyria: "Yet she (Nineveh) became an exile; she went into captivity; her infants were dashed in pieces at the head of every street; for her honored men lots were cast, and all her great men were bound in chains" (ESV). The prophetic oracles of Nahum need to considered in their historical setting because Nahum came on the scene in order to proclaim God's message of judgment against Assyria (1:1).

The book of Nahum itself describes the destruction of Assyria (1:8; 1:10; 3:13; 3:12; 3:19) around the end of the seventh century BCE (612 BCE) by mentioning the destruction of Thebes (664 BCE) (3:8) (Dillard and Longman 1994:404). When Nahum began to prophesy against Assyria (around 600 BCE), the empire of Assyria was "at its height" and its army was "the largest and most efficient the Mediterranean world had ever known, and also the cruelest" (Lacy

[171] Hosea, a prophet of the northern kingdom Israel, occasionally prophesied concerning the southern kingdom Judah (Hs 4:15; 5:5, 10, 12-14; 6:4, 11).

2010:217). In 612 BCE, the Babylonians, allied with the Medes under Nabololassar King of Babylon, attacked and destroyed Nineveh.

5.28 Theological themes of Nahum

5.28.1 The destruction of Assyria

The main theme of Nahum is that God will bring judgment against Assyria because of the sin that they committed (Butterworth 1994:835). The reason why God would judge Assyria is because of the evil deeds that Assyria did especially to Israel and to Judah. Assyria, which destroyed the northern kingdom of Israel (722 BCE), had been oppressing the kingdom of Judah for about a century (Sweeney 2012:800). Assyria once was the instrument of God to judge Israel but now becomes the object of God's judgment. Nahum 1:2 says, "The Lord is a jealous and avenging God; the Lord is avenging and wrathful; the Lord takes vengeance on his adversaries and keeps wrath for his enemies" (ESV).

5.28.2 Message of hope for Judah and the reverse outcome

God's message through Nahum is to provide "comfort" (as the name, Nahum means) to Judah, which had gone through the affliction of Assyria for a long time. The name Nahum, "Comfort", also has a "contra-intuitive" meaning in the oracles of Nahum, "avenging"– God's avenging Israel in the face of Assyria (Bruckner 2004:135). Thus, the message of Nahum is that Assyria, once the destroyer of Israel and oppressor of Judah, is to be destroyed. The prophecy of the destruction of Assyria was fulfilled by the Babylonians and Medes in 612 BCE.

While there is a message of judgment against Assyria, there is a message of restoration for Judah. This "contrasting futures for Judah and Assyria" is described in Nahum 1:12-14. What can be known is that God "exercises control over all people, not just Judah" (Baker 2012:563). Nahum portrays the character of God: he is a God of judgment and salvation or goodness/mercy and justice (Stuart 2002:243).

Psalm 137 can be understood in light of the themes of the book of Nahum. Comfort, one of the main themes of Nahum, is what the psalmist along with the deported people seeks from God in Psalm 137. In Nahum, the message of 'comfort' is announced on behalf of Judah. Based on the message of 'comfort', the deported people of Psalm 137 can expect the restoration of Jerusalem after the Babylonian exile.

5.29 Imprecation in the nearer context of Nahum 3:10

In 3:8-13, Nahum utters oracles against Nineveh by comparing it to Thebes ("Are you better than Thebes?"), once a strong city of Egypt which Assyria destroyed (Brucker 2004:185). The passage describes what Nineveh did to Egypt: "Yet she (Egypt) became an exile, she went into captivity; her infants were dashed into pieces at the head of every street; for her honored men lots were cast, and all her great men were bound in chains" (vv. 10). With the language of full warfare, the passage says that because Nineveh is not better than Thebes, the fate of Nineveh will be like that of Thebes – total destruction. As Thebes was destroyed at the hands of Nineveh, Nineveh will be destroyed at the hands of the Babylonians (vv. 11-18).

In Nahum 3:1-7, an oracle of woe and taunt is announced against Nineveh. Vv. 1-3 describe the judgment of Assyria with the reason for judgment (v. 4) and with strong imagery of an "alluring harlot as the means of enslaving the nations" (vv. 5-7) (Stuart 2002:242). After this oracle, Nahum concludes with a satirical dirge over fallen Nineveh (vv. 8-19), "O king of Assyria; your people are scattered on the mountains with none to gather them. There is no easing your hurt; your wound is grievous. All who hear the news about you clap their hands over you. For upon whom has not come your unceasing evil?" (ESV). Thus, as Brucker correctly says, the main theme that permeates chapter 3 is "the end of Nineveh's endless cruelty" (Bruckner 2004:182).

5.30 Imprecation in the broader context of Nahum 3:10

There is a general consensus that Nahum can easily be divided into two sections: chapter 1 and chapters 2-3 (Arnold & Beyer 1998:456; Brucker 2004:179; Butterworth 1994:835; Nogalski 2011:608). Chapter 1 portrays God as the judge or the "divine warrior" who would eventually

judge Assyria, and chapters 2-3 echo[172] chapter 1 with a variety of corresponding themes and concepts (Armerding 2005:560). The book of Nahum begins with the description of God as the triumphant divine warrior in the holy war who takes vengeance over the enemies (1:1-8). Besides this description, God is also described as a God of goodness and compassion who is slow to anger (vv. 3, 7) (Stuart 2002:242). This description of God as a God of judgment and salvation side by side in 1:1-8 sets the theological foundations for the rest of the book of Nahum, intimating how God would deal with the nations, especially Assyria. After Nahum 1:1-8, in the rest of chapter 1 (1:9-15) are found oracles of the judgment against Assyria and salvation for Judah. Then, 2:1-3:19 describes the fall of Nineveh with "the vision of Nineveh's demise" (2:4-11) and the woe-oracle against her (3:1-3) (Butterworth 1994:835; Longman 1993:778). The destruction of Assyria was certain and unavoidable because God himself was against Assyria (2:13; 3:5).

It is worth noting that the judgment oracle against Assyria is announced first directly to Judah, assuring them the judgment is "an act of YHWH" (1:11-2:1), and then to Nineveh, expressing that their fall is also "an act of YHWH" (2:2-3:19). The oracle against Assyria is addressed to Judah because God will restore Judah through the destruction of Assyria just as Hosea 1:13 says, "So now, I will break his (Assyria's) yoke bar from upon you (Judah), and I will tear off your shackles" (NASB). The oracle addressed to Assyria is indeed dreadful, "Yet she became an exile,

[172] Armerding (2005:560) provides a paradigm that show how chapters 2-3 repeat the themes of chapter 1 as follows.

	Chapter 1	Chapters 2-3
	Judgment (A)	Judgment (A')
Executed on evil	1:11 (*rā'â*)	3:19 (*rā'â*)
By flood	1:8 (*šeṭep*)	2:6, 8[7, 9] (gates opened)
By fire	1:6 (*'ēš*)	2:3[4]; 3:13, 15 (*'ēš*)
That consumes	1:10 (*'ākal*)	3:13, 15 (twice) (*'ākal*)
By drunkenness	1:10 (*sābā'*)	3:11 (*tiš^{e}rî*)
Exception	1:7 (those who trust)	2:2[3] (Jacob/Israel)
	Sentence (B)	Sentence (B')
Messenger formula	1:12 ("This is what the LORD says")	2:13[14]; 3:5 ("declares the LORD Almighty")
Against	1:14 (*'āleykā*)	2:13[14]; 3:5 (*'ēlayik*)
Result: Cut off	1:14-15 (*kārat*)	2:13[14]; 3:15 (*kārat*)
No more	1:14-15 (*lō''ôd*)	2:13[14] (*lō''ôd*)
End: vileness, shame	1:14 (*qālal*)	3:5 (*qālôn*)
	Response (C)	Response (C')
On the mountains	1:15[2:1] (*'al-hehārîm*)	3:18 (*'al-hehārîm*)
Proclaim	1:15[2:1] (*mašmîa'*)	2:13[14]; 3:19(2x) (*šāma'*)

she went into captivity; also her small children were dashed to pieces" (3:10); "There fire will consume you, the sword will cut you down" (3:15, NASB).

It needs to be remembered that Assyria was one of the nations that became the target of God's judgment in the book of Isaiah (Is 10). In connection with the books of Isaiah and Jeremiah, it becomes clear that any nation could become the object of God's judgment, and the nations undergo God's severe judgment involving the death of infants in the context of war according to the prophets of God (Hosea, Israel and Jeremiah).

5.31 Imprecation in the canonical context of the Twelve

The book of the Twelve (which is also known as the book of the minor prophets) to which Hosea and Nahum belong needs to be briefly discussed before proceeding any further, because the book of the Twelve, as Sweeney explains, "functions as a collection of twelve individual prophetic works and as a single prophetic book" (Sweeney 2012:788). The prophets of the Twelve (along with Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel of the latter prophets) address the oracles of judgments against Assyria (8th century BCE – Am, Hs, Jnh and Mi) and Babylon (7th century BCE – Nah, Zph and Hab) and offer messages of judgment and restoration to Judah (6-5th century BCE).

Roughly in chronological order, each book has a superscription that provides the identity of the prophet and that provides the historical setting within which the prophet ministered and the book's major concerns (Sweeney 2012:788). The audience of the prophets vary: the Assyrians, Israel (the Northern Kingdom), Judah (the Southern Kingdom), the captives in Babylon, the Edomites and the returned exiles of Babylon. The eighth century prophets (Hosea, Amos and Micah) address judgmental oracles mainly to Israel, the Northern Kingdom. The seventh century prophets (Zephaniah, Habbkuk and Jeremiah) address Judah, the southern kingdom. The prophets Daniel and Ezekiel were active during the Babylonian exile. However, prophets like Jonah, Nahum and Obadiah were prophets to nations other than Israel and Judah.

Jonah preached repentance in Nineveh and the people repented and believed God (8th century). However, about a century later (7th century), prophet Nahum prophesied the message of

judgment to the people of Nineveh and because the later generations were not as repentant as their forefathers were, they were destroyed by the Babylonian/Mede alliance. Obadiah, late exilic or early post-exilic prophet delivered oracles of judgment against Edom for the evil deeds that Edom did to Jerusalem (cf. Jr 49:7-22) (Sweeney 2012:797).

Likewise, the prophets preached to Israel and Judah throughout the centuries. Mainly, the messages of judgment were addressed to wayward Israel and Judah (8th century). After the fall of the northern kingdom, the messages of judgment were addressed to the southern kingdom, Judah (7th century) and the messages of hope/restoration to Judah in exile (6th century) and even to post-exilic Judah (6-5th century).

It can be summed up that in dealing with his people including the surrounding nations, God either punishes or restores. God warned His people through His prophets for centuries whenever they disobeyed God and His covenant. After punishing them, God also gave them chances to repent of their sin and return to Him. God restores them by destroying their enemies (Assyria, Edom and Babylon).

5.32 Psalm 137 in light of Hosea 14:1, Nahum 3:10 and the Twelve

The books of Hosea and Nahum are replete with the themes of curse, judgment and restoration. This section interprets the imprecation in Psalm 137 in the literary context of Hosea and Nahum, which contain the curse of the death of infants.

Based on the discussion above, this study now reads Psalm 137 in light of Hosea and Nahum as well as the rest of the Twelve. We have seen that Hosea presents mainly God's judgment of Israel because of her unfaithfulness to the covenant (with the metaphor of marriage) and the restoration after the judgment. We have also seen that Nahum presents the restoration of Judah through the destruction of Assyria. The prophecy was fulfilled and Nineveh was actually destroyed by the Babylonians and Medes in 612 BCE. However, Judah's continuous rebellion and sin made God furious and Jerusalem was destroyed by Babylon in 586 BCE. Throughout the Twelve (and the latter prophets as well), the people of Judah are warned many times that if they

keep sinning and do not return to God, they would be judged and destroyed. They refused to repent and eventually were taken away into captivity by the Babylonians. That is the reason, as Psalm 137:1 shows, why the people sat down and wept as they remembered Zion.

The psalmist of Psalm 137 utters the imprecation against Judah's enemy, Babylon, seeking God's vengeance and calling anyone blessed who dashes the little children of Babylon on the rock (vv. 8-9). The imprecations spoken out by the psalmist do not simply indicate the death of the little children of any nation. Rather, they indicate the utter destruction of a nation and all its people, including the little ones. Thus, any nation that experiences the imprecation is one that has committed evil and become the target of God's judgment. God's people experienced the imprecation: Israel by Assyria and Judah by Babylon. The surrounding nations of Israel and Judah experienced the imprecation for the evil deeds they did to Israel and Judah: Assyria by Babylon (Nahum) and Babylon by Persia (Is 13 and Jr 50-51).

Having probably known that God would certainly destroy Babylon and Edom for the sake of Judah's restoration, the psalmist in Psalm 137 was able to offer the imprecatory prayer to God. The psalmist probably already knew the prophetic words of God that testified to the future destruction of Babylon by Persia. That is the basis for why the psalmist asked God for vengeance on Babylon and blessed whoever would repay them with what they did to Judah, and who takes their little ones and dashes them against the rock! (137:8-9). The little ones of Judah, in the same way, were dashed against the rock by the Babylonians, and now the psalmist says that whoever does the same thing that Babylon did to Judah will be called blessed!

The imprecatory lament offered by the psalmist in Psalm 137 does not seem to be answered by God, because the psalm itself does not contain any words of restoration and hope. However, the psalm ends with the imprecation encapsulated in a beatitude formula, "Blessed will be the one who takes and dashes your little ones against the Rock!" (v. 9). The reason why the psalmist uses the beatitude formula is because the destruction of Babylon means the restoration and hope of Judah. The theme of the restoration and hope of Judah, just as we have seen, is one of the themes that is found in the book of the Twelve. Just as he already knew the message of judgment against Babylon, the Psalmist already knew the message of hope that the prophets spoke.

Chapter 6
SYNTHESIS

6.1 Introduction

This research begins with the statement that the Imprecatory Psalm is ostensibly unfitting in the *Psalter* and the Old Testament because the term, imprecation suggests cursing others to the point of destruction. Psalm 137 is selected for this study because it contains the very harsh imprecation of infant death. Certainly the Imprecatory Psalm does not seem to be in harmony with the broader message of the *Psalter* or the Old Testament. The Imprecatory Psalm and God's command to love foreigners (Dt 10:19) and not to take revenge (Lv 19:18) seem to contradict each other.

6.2 Problem setting

This study is motivated by the seemingly contradictory words, "Imprecatory Psalm"; praising or praying to God in order that judgment might come upon one's enemies does not sound theologically correct. The study is also motivated by a *genre* issue: is Imprecatory Psalm an independent *genre* or subordinated to Lament Psalms? The study is further motivated by the psalmist's usage of the word "*ashrei*" in 137:9, "Blessed (*ashrei*) are those who take revenge and dash infants (vv. 8-9)." This "*ashrei*" is certainly not in conformity with other "*ashrei*" psalms, "Blessed (*ashrei*) is the one whose delight is in the law of the Lord" (Ps 1:1), "Blessed (*ashrei*) are those who dwell in your house; they are ever praising you" (Ps 84:4) and God's command not to take revenge (Lv 19:18).

6.3 Aims and objectives

This study provided a literature review before embarking on the canonical approach to Psalm 137. This research undertook an exegetical and literary-historical study of the psalm in order to draw out the theological themes of the psalm. With the themes drawn out, the study read the

psalm in the canonical context of the whole *Psalter* (Book I – Book V) and in connection with the passages of the Old Testament that contain the 'imprecation' theme of dashing/killing infants (Dt 32, 2 Ki 8, Is 13, Jr 50, Hs 13 and Nah 3). Reading the psalm in the canonical context of the Old Testament helps identify how the imprecation of the psalm can be understood together with other passages that contain the same imprecation.

6.4 Methodology

Methodologically, the study is primarily a canonical-exegetical-theological-literary study of the Imprecatory Prayer of Psalm 137. The approach is canonical because the study seeks to find the intent of the Psalmist's imprecation in the canonical context of the *Psalter* and in connection with the rest of the Old Testament books that contain the "imprecation" theme of Psalm 137. It is exegetical because exegesis on the psalm is performed in order to draw out its theological themes. It is also theological because finding the theological significance of the "imprecation" theme and related themes like judgment and destruction in the psalm is what this study seeks to do. It is literary because the study seeks to find the intent of the psalmist's imprecation within the literary context of the whole *Psalter* (Book I – Book V) and in context of the other Old Testament books that contain the imprecation of the death of infants (Dt 32:25; 2 Ki 8:12; Is 13:15-18; Jr 51:20-23; Hs 14:1; Nah 3:10).

6.5 Chapter outline

Chapter one of this study begins with the statement that Psalm 137, an Imprecatory Psalm is "ostensibly unfitting" in the Bible. This study utilizes the canonical approach in order to solve the difficult nature of the Imprecatory Prayer of the psalm because of a couple of reasons. The first reason is that the canonical approach, a fairly recent methodology, has not been applied to Imprecatory Psalms like Psalm 137; thus, applying the canonical approach to the Imprecatory Psalms was what this study sought to do. The second reason is that there was a paradigm shift both in Old Testament studies and Psalm studies from a historical-critical approach to a canonical one. Thus, this study utilises a canonical approach as the methodology, fitting with recent trends.. In the methodology section, this study deals first with scholars of the canonical

process (Fishbane and Sanders) and then with scholars of the canonical shape (Childs, Rendtorff and Sheppard). Afterwards, Wilson's understanding of canonical study of the *Psalter* was discussed; Wilson's approach is an amalgam of both canonical process and canonical shape. The final canonical shape of the Old Testament is the end result of the long activity of the canonical process (Wilson).

Chapter two of this study deals with the history of interpretation of the Imprecatory Psalms. The aim of this chapter is to find how various groups of scholars have attempted to interpret the Imprecatory Psalms and ends with various conclusions. Strengths and weaknesses of each group of interpreters are discussed. This chapter concludes by proposing that the canonical approach can go beyond the weaknesses of other methods that have been utilized by various scholars. It also mentions that the canonical approach should be utilized because it does not seek "one hermeneutical key" (unlike the scholars of various interpretations that are discussed in chapter two) but rather "provides the arena in which the struggle for understanding takes place" (Childs 1985:15).

Chapter three undertakes a careful exegetical study of Psalm 137 in order to draw out key theological themes or motifs from the psalm before embarking on a canonical reading of the psalm. By undertaking literary-historical study and structural analysis of the Psalm, this chapter lays the foundation for the canonical reading in the subsequent chapters (chs. 4, 5) with the theological themes drawn out from the psalm.

Chapter four, then, attempts to read Psalm 137 in the canonical context of the whole *Psalter* in order to see how the *Psalter* as whole speaks of Imprecatory Prayer. The difficult nature of the imprecatory theme in Psalm 137 become clearer and understandable after reading the psalm in the canonical context of the whole *Psalter*. Imprecatory words of the psalmist in Psalm 137 can be justified by other psalms in Books I-V of the *Psalter* because the whole *Psalter* speaks of the restoration of the exiled people of Judah by means of the judgment of Babylon.

Lastly, chapter five reads Psalm 137 in the canonical context of the rest of the Old Testament. The passages that show intertextual connections with the psalm are selected and discussed (Dt 32,

2 Ki 8, Is 13, Jr 51, Hs 13 and Nah 3). It is discussed that God has dealt with His people based on the covenant made with Israel at Sinai. The future fate of Israel totally depended on how Israel would respond to the Sinai covenant; if they obey, they would be blessed and if they disobey, cursed. Moreover, it is seen that while there are messages for Israel, there are also messages for Israel's enemies. Among the nations, special attention is given to Babylon, the greatest enemy, who destroyed the Jerusalem temple and took the people away into captivity. It is emphasized that God would certainly destroy Babylon in order to restore Judah. Any curse that involved the little infants being dashed against rock would not have been not something Israel was unfamiliar with, because this curse was the consequence of God's judgment in the context of war.

6.6 Imprecatory prayer and its theological significance

Reading Psalm 137 in the canonical context of the whole *Psalter* and the rest of the Old Testament, as done in the previous chapters, has come to a conclusion as a result of various theological findings. In chapter 2 the reader experiences the unsatisfactory solutions of various scholars with various methodologies. The purpose of this study is to go beyond the unsatisfactory solutions to the difficult nature of the Imprecatory Prayer in order to find a more satisfactory solution by reading the psalm in the canonical context of the Old Testament. The result of the canonical reading of Psalm 137 proves to be the most satisfactory solution to the Imprecatory Prayer. Thus, this section of the chapter summarizes the theological findings that resulted from reading Psalm 137 in the canonical context of the Old Testament. Below follows a list of the findings.

1. The theme of curse needs to be considered in connection with the covenant that God made with His people Israel. Curse along with blessing is first found in the covenant that God made with Abraham. It was God's promise to bless those who bless Abraham and curse those who curse him.
2. The theme of curse is picked up in the Sinai (Mosaic) covenant that God established with the people of the Exodus generation. This covenant was renewed once again in Deuteronomy where the theme of curse and blessing was re-emphasized.

3. The theme of curse permeates the deuteronomistic history of the former prophets. God's people were subject to the curse of God because of their continuous breaking of the laws of the covenant (2 Sm 11-21; 1 Kg 11, 14; 2 Ki 8, 17, 24-25).
4. The curse as the judgment of God in the form of exile in a foreign land was proclaimed by God's prophets, especially Isaiah and Jeremiah (Is 1-12, 28-33; Jr 2-25). Facing this curse, Judah experienced the defeat involving the death of her own people, the destruction of the nation and exile into a foreign land. The captivity and exile of Judah in a foreign land, Babylon (as Ps 137 shows), is the fulfillment of the prophecies of Isaiah and Jeremiah concerning wayward Judah. That is the reason why the psalmist of Psalm 137 cries out for vengeance and judgment on Babylon.
5. The clue for the difficult nature of the Imprecatory Prayer uttered by the psalmist – blessed are the revengers and blessed are the children-killers! – is found in the very words of God through the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah (Is 13; Jr 51). The imprecatory words uttered by the psalmist were already spoken by the prophets.
6. The message of restoration and hope which the psalmist of Psalm 137 seeks to hear, is found especially in the latter prophets where the message of judgment against Babylon is found (Is 40-66; Jr 20-33).
7. The above-mentioned findings are the most satisfactory solutions to the difficult nature of the Imprecatory Prayer in the Hebrew Bible. Thus, the imprecation involving the death of little children can be understood once it is considered in connection with the judgment of God's people and the neighboring nations. First, this imprecation appears as a warning of God toward God's people. If they disobey the covenant, God would punish them at the hands of other nations which would lead to utter destruction and exile. Second, this imprecation appears as the judgmental words of God toward Judah's enemies, especially Babylon. Babylon, once the enemy and destroyer of Judah, became the target of God's judgment for the sake of Judah's restoration and hope.

The problem statement of this study begins with the fact that the term "Imprecatory Psalm" seems to be an oxymoron because "praising or praying to God in order to curse others certainly does not sound biblical". Moreover, it has been mentioned that the imprecation of Psalm 137 seems to contradict God's command to love foreigners (Dt 10:19) and not to take vengeance (Lv

19:18). In the previous chapters, this study attempted to solve the problem of the difficult nature of the Imprecatory Prayer of Psalm 137 by reading the psalm in view of other related passages that contain the imprecation of the death of the little children. Based on the findings that resulted from reading Psalm 137 in the canonical context of the Old Testament, this section turns to focus on the application of the Imprecatory Prayer as mentioned in the problem statement of chapter 1.

How should we understand the psalmist's imprecation, "Blessed are the revengers and children-killers!" in connection with God's commands, "love your neighbors (foreigners)" and "do not revenge" found in the Pentateuch (Lv 19:18; Dt 10:19)? As previously discussed, God's commands to love your neighbors (foreigners) and not to take revenge, along with other commands, were given to the Israelites while God was making or reaffirming the covenant with them at Sinai. The list of blessings and curses were given to them who were to choose to obey or disobey. However, the Israelites kept disobeying rather than obeying, and eventually they experienced the destruction of Jerusalem and exile at the hands of the Babylonians. They were supposed to obey all the commands of the covenant including "love your neighbors and foreigners" and "do not revenge" ever since they received the commandments at Sinai. But the Israelites failed to keep the covenant and suffered the consequences.

Nevertheless, God promised to restore the Israelites. Probably having known the promise of the restoration through the prophets, the psalmist was able to cry out for vengeance to God in order to restore Judah. If the prophets had not prophesied the restoration of Judah through the judgment of Babylon, the psalmist would not have uttered the Imprecatory Prayer. The oracle against Babylon spoken by the prophets was the basis of the psalmist's imprecation. Thus, the psalmist's imprecation has to be considered with the prophets' oracles of judgment. Because the prophets first uttered the imprecation of the judgment on Babylon, the psalmist uttered the same imprecation with vengeful words (Is 13:16; Jr 51:22; Hs 14:1; Nah 3:10). The psalmist already knew that God's just punishment of a nation involves utter destruction.

Thus, it is fair to say that the imprecation uttered by the prophets and the psalmist constitute the very words of God for the sake of Judah's restoration and hope. Because the psalmist's imprecation should be regarded as the words of God, it is still fair to say that the psalmist's

imprecation does not contradict God's commands of the covenant: "love your neighbors and foreigners" and "do not revenge." The Israelites should have kept the commands of the covenant in the first place. The consequences of their continuous disobedience were the destruction of Jerusalem and captivity in Babylon. In this way, there is no contradiction between the commands of God ("do not revenge") and the psalmist's imprecation ("blessed are the revengers and the children-killers"). This is because imprecation is what can be expected after Judah disobeyed (to the commands of the covenant) and the oracle of judgment against Babylon was announced. All of these are the words of God. Moreover, the term "Imprecatory Prayer", which may seem to promote any form of imprecation while praying or praising to God, in fact, does not contradict the message of the rest of the Old Testament.

Once again, because the imprecation uttered first by the prophets and then by psalmist has to be considered with the concept of the covenant (the covenant that was frequently broken by Israel but renewed by God), no Christian who reads Psalm 137 should pray like the psalmist; the reader should not seek revenge like the psalmist. Rather, the reader should pray and seek to live an obedient life to God by loving neighbors and foreigners and not by taking vengeance on enemies. Therefore the imprecatory prayer of the psalmist cannot be applicable today.

6.7 Hypothesis

Reading the Imprecatory Prayer of Psalm 137 in the canonical context of the *Psalter* and together with the Old Testament passages that contain the imprecation of the death of infants (Dt 32:25; 2 Ki 8:12; Is 13:15-18; Jr 51:20-23; Hs 14:1; Nah 3:10) proves that the psalmist's imprecation in Psalm 137 is in harmony with the broader message of the *Psalter* (Ps 1:1-2, "Blessed is the man who delight is in the law of YHWH") and the Old Testament (Lv 19:18; Dt 10:19, "love your neighbors and foreigners and do not seek revenge").

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