Psalm 137*

By the rivers of Babylon
We sat down.
Weeping a*nd wearing*
The deepest frown,
When we recalled Zion –
Our heads' former crown.

On its poplar trees,
Our harps
We hung,
When our captors demanded
That our songs
Be sung.
The tormentors wished
To be entertained:
"Sing songs of Zion!" –
But we refrained!
How could we sing
The Lord's song
In a foreign land –
It felt so wrong!

If I forget you
Jerusalem
Let my right hand's strength
Fail.
Let my tongue stick
To my palate
If remembrance
Won't prevail,
If, at the pinnacle
of my joy,
Jerusalem
I don't hail.

Remember, Lord,
The Edomites
On the day of
Jerusalem's fall,
Constantly baying
To strip her down
To the foundation
Of each wall.

O daughter
Of Babylon,
Fated
To be laid waste.
How happy the One
Who shall make you pay
For rendering us
Debased.

Happy shall be
The One to seize
Your infants
And smash their heads
Against your country's
Rocky crags
As retribution
Spreads.

* Translation from my *The Book of Psalms: Poetry in Poetry* (Wipf & Stock, 2018), pp. 223-224.

Note: As my renderings are both cross-lingual and poetic, accommodation has had to be made for the differing metres of the respective languages. This occasionally leaves us with a line short in translation, which I've filled in in the spirit of the context. The added lines have been indicated by italicization.

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I take no responsibility for the tenor of the last stanza's expression, other than to state that we cannot blame the psalmist for profoundly lamenting the devastation and pouring out all his anxiety and grief at the loss of his homeland, family, friends livelihood, and religious and cultural freedom in the most extreme of terms.

Shabbat shalom v'tzom kal

Rabbi Jeffrey