

Jason Freeman

Al Naharot Bavel
(Psalm 137)

for baritone and piano

Program note:

The text, the 137th psalm from the Book of Psalms, expresses mourning at the destruction of the Temple and the exile of the Jews, as well an extreme (by modern standards) desire for vengeance. But most importantly, this psalm asks that we remember Jerusalem and the Temple's destruction even when we are content, even in our happiest moments. This last message of the psalm is reflected in its use in contemporary Judaism: a verse of the psalm is recited at weddings before the bridegroom crushes a glass (a ritual which also recalls the destruction of the Temple); and the psalm is often recited as part of prayers after meals, to recall the destruction of the Temple even at a time when our bodies are full and content.

In this setting, I have tried to reconcile liturgical musical styles with contemporary art music. Many of the melodies are based loosely on ancient Sephardic melodies for this psalm, and portions of the piano accompaniment allude to harmonies and textures common in American hymn settings. These allusions, though, are placed in the context of a more abstract and dissonant musical style.

Performance notes:

- Accidentals hold for the duration of the measure, only in the octave in which they appear. Courtesy accidentals are sometimes provided; to limit clutter; they are not placed in parentheses.
- For all meter changes, the eighth note remains constant.
- In mm. 27-28 and m. 63, ossia notes are provided for the singer. These are indicated by small noteheads enclosed in parentheses.

Duration: approximately 5'30"

The translation printed on the following page is reprinted from Richard G. Moulton's *The Modern Reader's Bible: The Psalms and Lamentations, volume II*. New York: MacMillan and Company, 1900: 152-153. This text is in the public domain.

The transliteration is the composer's own.

עַל אֲנָחַת נְהַרֹת בְּבֶל, שָׁם יִשְׁבְּנוּ גַם בְּכִינּוּ, בְּזִכְרֵנוּ אֶת
צִיּוֹן. בַּעַל עֲרָבִים בְּתוֹכָהּ, תִּלְיֵנוּ כְּנִירוֹתֵינוּ. גַּ כִּי
שָׁם שְׁאֵלוּנוּ שׁוֹבֵינּוּ דְבָרֵי שִׁיר וְתוֹלְלֵינוּ שְׁמִחָה, שִׁירוּ
לָנוּ מִשִּׁיר צִיּוֹן. דַּ אֵיךְ נָשִׁיר אֶת שִׁיר יְהוָה, עַל אֲדָמַת
נֶכֶר. הַ אִם אֲשַׁכַּח יְרוּשָׁלַיִם, תִּשְׁכַּח יְמִינִי. וַ תִּדְבֹק
לְשׁוֹנִי לְחֵפְי, אִם לֹא אֲזַכְּרֶיךָ; אִם לֹא אֶעֱלֶה אֶת
יְרוּשָׁלַיִם עַל רֹאשׁ שְׁמִחָתִי. זַ זְכֹר יְהוָה לְבִנְי אָדוֹם אֶת
יוֹם יְרוּשָׁלַיִם; הָאֲמָרִים עָרוּ עָרוּ, עַד הִיָּסוּד בָּהּ. חַ בַּת
בְּבֶל הִשְׁדוּדָהּ, אֲשֶׁרִי שִׁישְׁלֵם לָךְ אֶת גְּמוּלָךְ שְׁגִמְלָתְ
לָנוּ. טַ אֲשֶׁרִי שִׁיאֲחֹז וְנִפְץ אֶת עַלְלִיךָ אֶל הַסֵּלַע.

Al na-ha-rot' ba-vel'
sham ya-shav'-nu
gam ba-chi'-nu
be-zauch-rei'-nu et tzi-yon'.

Al a-ra-vim' b[^]-to-cha'
ta-li'-nu ki-no-ro-tei'-nu.

Ki sham sh[^]-lu'-nu sho-vei'-nu div-rei' shir
v[^]-to-la-lei'-nu sim-cha'
shi'-ru la'-nu m[^]-shir' tzi-yon'.

Eich na-shir' et shir a-do-nai'
al ad-mat' ne-char'.

Im esh-ka-chech' ye-ru-sha-la'-yim
t[^]sh-kach' y[^]-mi-ni'.

Tid-bak' l[^]-sho-ni' l[^]-ch[^]-ki'
im lo ez-k[^]-re'-chi
im lo a'-a-leh et ye-ru-sha-la'-yim
al rosh sim-cha-ti'.

Ze-chor' a-do-nai' liv-nei' e-dom'
et yom ye-ru-sha-la'-yim
ha-om-rim' a'-ru a'-ru
ad ha-y[^]-sod' bah.

Bat ba-vel' ha-sh[^]-du'-da
ash-rei' she-y[^]-sha-lem' lach
et g[^]-mu'-lech she-ga-malt' la'-nu.

Ash-rei' she-yo-chez' v[^]-ni-petz'
et o-la-la'-yich el ha-sa'-la.

By the rivers of Babylon,
there we sat down,
yea, we wept,
when we remembered Zion.

Upon the willows in the midst thereof
we hanged up our harps.

For there they that led us captive required of us songs
and they that wasted us required of us mirth:
"Sing us one of the songs of Zion."

How shall we sing the LORD's song
in a strange land?

If I forget thee, O Jerusalem,
let my right hand forget her cunning;

let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth
if I remember thee not;
if I prefer not Jerusalem
above my chief joy.

Remember, O LORD, against the children of Edom
the day of Jerusalem;
Who said, "Rase it, rase it,
even to the foundation thereof."

O daughter of Babylon, that art to be destroyed,
Happy shall he be, that rewardeth thee
as thou hast served us;

Happy shall he be, that taketh
and dasheth thy little ones against the rock.

Notes on the transliteration:

Stressed syllables are indicated by accents (^). In a few instances, these stresses differ slightly from those suggested by the music; in these cases, the stresses should be placed in accordance with the music.

Below is a table listing all of the phonemes used in the transliteration, their common interpretations in English, and their symbols in the International Phonetic Alphabet.

LETTER	INTERPRETATION	IPA SYMBOL
^	pit	I
A	father	a:
AI	pie, by	aɪ
AU	caught, law	ɛ
B	bib	b
CH	guttural (throat) ch as in German <i>ach</i>	X
D	deed	d
E	pet	ɛ
EI	pay	e
G	gag	g
H	hat	h
I	bee	i
K	kick	k
L	lid	l
M	mum	m
N	no, sudden	n
O	toe	o
P	pop	p
R	roar	r
S	sauce	s
SH	ship, dish	ʃ
T	tight	t
TZ	tsunami, tsimmies	ts
U	boot	u
V	valve	v
Y	yes	j
Z	zebra	z

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Mournful $\bullet = 48$

Baritone

Piano

pp

5 *p* *mp* *mf*

Al na - ha - rot' ba - vel' sham ya - shav' - - nu

5 *p* *mp*

9 *f* *mp* *p*

gam ba - chi' - nu be - zauch -

mf *f* *p* *pp*

8va-- (loco) *8va--* (loco) *8va--* (loco)

8vb-- (loco)

12

rei' - nu et tzi - - yon'.

16

Al a - ra - vim' b^ - to - cha' ta -

Flowing
♩ = 60
mp mf

20

li' - nu ki - no - ro - tei' - nu.

p

23 *p* Tense

Ki sham sh[^] - lu' - nu sho -

mp *p* Tense

25 *mf* *mp* *p* *f* rit.

vei - nu div - rei' shir v[^] - to - la - lei' - nu sim - cha' _____

mf *mp* *p* *f* rit.

Heavy = 52 *ff* *f* *ff* *mp*

27 shi' - ru la' - nu m[^] - shir' tzi - yon'.

Heavy = 52 *ff* *f* *ff* *p* *pp*

Freely *p* rit.

33

Eich na - shir' et shir a - do - nai' al ad - mat' ne - char'.

Freely rit.

33

Lyrical and expressive $\text{♩} = 60$

37 *pp* *mf* *p*

Im esh - ka - chech' ye - ru - sha - la' - yim t'sh - kach' y^ - mi - ni'. Tid -

Lyrical and expressive $\text{♩} = 60$

37 *ppp* (loco) *pp* (loco) *p* *pp* (loco)

pp *p* *mf* *p*

41 *mf* *f* *p* *mf* *mp*

bak' Tid - bak' l^ - sho - ni' Tid - bak' l^ - sho - ni' l^ - ch^ - ki' Tid -

41 *p* (loco) *p* *pp* (loco) *p* (loco)

mf *f* *pp* *p* *mf*

45 *mf* *f*

bak' l^ - sho - ni' l^ - ch^ - ki' im lo ez - k^re' - chi im

pp *p* *mp* (loco) *mf* (loco) *f*

mp *mf* *f*

49 *ff* *mp* *mf* *p*

lo a' - - - a - leh et ye - ru - sha - la' - yim al

pp *p* (loco) *p* (loco) *mp* (loco)

ff *mp* *mf*

53 *pp* Intense and Focused *f*

rosh sim - cha - - ti'. Ze - chor' - a - do - nai' - liv -

pp *ppp* *f* *f*

pp *ppp* *f* *f*

Intense and Focused

58 *p* *mf* *f*

nei' e - dom' et yom ye - ru - sha - la' - yim ha -

58 *p* *mf* (loco) *f* (loco)

58 *p* *mf* *f*

62 *ff*

om - rim' a' - ru a' - ru ad ha - y^ - sod' bah.

62 *ff* (loco)

62 *ff*

65 *p* *f* *Ominous* *p*

Bat ba-vel' ha-sh^ - du' - da ash -

65 *f* *mp* *Ominous* *p*

65 *f* *mp* *Ominous* *p*

65 *f* *mp* *Ominous* *p*

rit. *f*

72

rei' she - y[^] - sha - lem' lach et g[^] - mu' - lech she - ga - malt' la' - nu. Ash - - -

(loco) *rit.* *f*

8^{va} (loco) 8^{vb}

Vindictive

76 $\bullet = 48$

rei' she - yo - chez' v[^] - ni - petz' et o - la - la' - yich el ha - sa' - - - la. *ff*

Vindictive

76 $\bullet = 48$

f *rit.* *ff*

8^{va} (loco) 8^{vb}

79 **Subdued** $\bullet = 40$

79 **Subdued** $\bullet = 40$

ff *sub. p* *pp* n.

8^{va} (loco) 8^{vb}