

# Devotional—day 16

## "On the Willows"

On the willows there  
We hung up our lives,  
For our captors there  
Required of us songs.  
And our tormentors mirth.

Sing us one of the songs of Zion.  
But how can we sing,  
Sing the Lord's song  
In a foreign land?

### **Psalms 137 (NASB)** ***An Experience of the Captivity***

- 1 By the rivers of Babylon,  
There we sat down and wept,  
When we remembered Zion.
- 2 **Upon the willows in the midst of it  
We hung our harps.**
- 3 **For there our captors  
demanded of us songs,  
And our tormentors mirth, saying,  
"Sing us one of the songs of Zion."**
- 4 **How can we sing the LORD'S song  
In a foreign land?**
- 5 If I forget you, O Jerusalem,  
May my right hand forget her skill.
- 6 May my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth  
If I do not remember you,  
If I do not exalt Jerusalem  
Above my chief joy.
- 7 Remember, O LORD,  
against the sons of Edom  
The day of Jerusalem,  
Who said, "Raze it, raze it  
To its very foundation."
- 8 O daughter of Babylon,  
you devastated one,  
How blessed will be  
the one who repays you  
With the recompense with which  
you have repaid us.
- 9 How blessed will be the one  
who seizes and dashes your little ones  
Against the rock.

### ***On the Willows***

My heart feels like the captives.  
I'm in a foreign land.  
My home is over yonder,  
Upon a gold strand.

The purchase price was heavy,  
But not for me—for Him!  
I don't know why He loved me.  
But, He has grace to lend!

If first, I lived with Jesus  
And daily saw his face,  
I can't imagine coming  
To this dark fallen place.

I would feel nothing less,  
Than foreign to this place;  
Where there is scant forgiveness  
And men live in disgrace.

How could I sing ~ make melody?  
My heart would be like lead.  
For, Jesus is the substance of  
The Song, the Bible says.

I crown Him King of everything;  
My life, my heart, and soul.  
I listen for the angel's song.  
For, heaven is my goal!

~ Joan Clifton Costner~

([http://underhiswings0.tripod.com/the\\_willows.htm](http://underhiswings0.tripod.com/the_willows.htm))

*The song "On the Willows," is taken from the text of the 137th Psalm. It, and many other Psalms, were written by the Israelites when they were taken as prisoners and exiled to Babylon in 587 B.C.E. They survived by telling their story, of Jerusalem, their people, and their faith. This is how they remembered and survived.*

## *Zion...*

Zion is an archaic term that originally referred to a specific mountain near Jerusalem (Mount Zion), on which stood a Jebusite fortress of the same name that was conquered by David. "Zion" came to be applied to the section of Jerusalem where the fortress stood, and later became synonymous with Jerusalem. "Zion" is also often a reference to Solomon's Temple. Today, "Zion" is often used metaphorically, to symbolize Jerusalem and the Promised Land to come, in which God dwells among his chosen people.

Zion played a central role in the political, cultural, and religious life of Israel. The oft-quoted statement of Gerhard von Rad is helpful in understanding why Zion should be extolled: "The songs of Zion were based on the fact of Yahweh's past choice of Zion, and the royal psalms on Yahweh's past choice of David: Isaiah turned completely to the future--Yahweh is about to deliver Zion, he is about to raise up the anointed one, the new David. It is here, in the future event, and not in any historical event of the past, that Jerusalem's salvation lies" (Theology of the Old Testament, II:175).

## *The Songs of Zion....*

The songs of Zion (i.e. the lyrical hymns) which express the longing of the Jewish nation to see the hill of Zion and the city of Jerusalem shine again in all their former glory date back to the time immediately after the destruction of Solomon's Temple. The psalms classified as Songs of Zion are Psalms 46, 48, 76, 84, 87, and 122 (which is also a Pilgrim Song). These songs praise Zion as the dwelling place of the LORD, the city of God, the holy mountain. They normally have the same form as hymns.

Since the destruction of the temple, the poets and singers of Israel have devoted their best talent to painting in the most brilliant colors the ancient glories of Zion. By far the greater numbers of these songs unite in voicing a heartfelt desire to see the nation, the city of Jerusalem, Mount Zion, and the Temple restored to their former splendor. The oldest song of Zion in Jewish literature was written in the fifth century B.C., and is a lamentation that the enemy compels Israel to live on foreign soil; this is the celebrated Ps. 137. 1-3. A similar Zionide of the same period is Ps. 126.; in it the poet, full of hope, sings of the day when the Captivity shall be over and the joyfully returning exiles shall sing a new song of Zion. The elegy ending with a desire for deliverance, which is found in the fifth chapter of Lamentations, dates probably from the first pre-Christian century.

### **Matthew 26:26-30 (NASB)**

#### *The Lord's Supper Instituted*

**26** While they were eating, Jesus took some bread, and after a blessing, He broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is My body."

**27** And when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you;

**28** for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins.

**29** "But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom."

**30** After singing a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

## *The Last Hallel*

According to Jewish tradition, Psalms 113 to 118 were sung at the annual feast of Passover. These were known as "The Great Hallel" or song of praise, from the same root as the word Hallelujah, "Praise to Jehovah." Supposedly Psalms 113 and 114 were sung with the second cup of Passover and Psalms 115 to 118 at the end of the meal.

The Gospels say that Jesus and the disciples went out to the Mount of Olives, after they had sung a hymn (Matthew 26:30). The word "hymn" has acquired the connotation of something rather solemn and plodding, but Thayer's Greek Lexicon defines the Greek word as meaning "A song of praise to a god." - a very positive idea. In Jewish practice, Passover songs are joyful and festive, so it seems reasonable to imagine that the hymn Jesus and the disciples sang had a triumphant tone. And well it should have, as the events of the next few days were to establish triumph over the power of death and sin, a deliverance far greater than even the miraculous deliverance of Israel from Egypt.

## *The Songs of Zion...*

### **Psalm 46** (The Message) *A Song of the Sons of Korah*

1-3 God is a safe place to hide,  
ready to help when we need him.  
We stand fearless at the cliff-edge of doom,  
courageous in seastorm and earthquake,  
Before the rush and roar of oceans,  
the tremors that shift mountains.  
Jacob-wrestling God fights for us,  
God-of-Angel-Armies protects us.

4-6 River fountains splash joy, cooling God's city,  
this sacred haunt of the Most High.  
God lives here, the streets are safe,  
God at your service from crack of dawn.  
Godless nations rant and rave,  
kings and kingdoms threaten,  
but Earth does anything he says.

7 Jacob-wrestling God fights for us,  
God-of-Angel-Armies protects us.

8-10 Attention, all! See the marvels of God!  
He plants flowers and trees all over the earth,  
Bans war from pole to pole,  
breaks all the weapons across his knee.  
"Step out of the traffic! Take a long,  
loving look at me, your High God,  
above politics, above everything."

11 Jacob-wrestling God fights for us,  
God-of-Angel-Armies protects us.

### **Psalm 76** (The Message) *An Asaph Psalm*

1-3 God is well-known in Judah; in Israel, he's a household name.  
He keeps a house in Salem,  
his own suite of rooms in Zion.  
That's where, using arrows for kindling,  
he made a bonfire of weapons of war.

4-6 Oh, how bright you shine!  
Outshining their huge piles of loot!  
The warriors were plundered  
and left there impotent.  
And now there's nothing to them,  
nothing to show for their swagger and threats.  
Your sudden roar, God of Jacob,  
knocked the wind out of horse and rider.

7-10 Fierce you are, and fearsome!  
Who can stand up to your rising anger?  
From heaven you thunder judgment;  
earth falls to her knees and holds her breath.  
God stands tall and makes things right,  
he saves all the wretched on earth.  
Instead of smoldering rage—God-praise!  
All that sputtering rage—now a garland for God!

11-12 Do for God what you said you'd do—  
he is, after all, your God.  
Let everyone in town bring offerings  
to the One Who Watches our every move.  
Nobody gets by with anything,  
no one plays fast and loose with him.

### **Psalm 48** (NIV) *A song. A psalm of the Sons of Korah.*

1 Great is the LORD, and most worthy of praise,  
in the city of our God, his holy mountain.

2 It is beautiful in its loftiness,  
the joy of the whole earth.  
Like the utmost heights of Zaphon is Mount Zion,  
the city of the Great King.

3 God is in her citadels;  
he has shown himself to be her fortress.

4 When the kings joined forces,  
when they advanced together,  
5 they saw her and were astounded;  
they fled in terror.

6 Trembling seized them there,  
pain like that of a woman in labor.

7 You destroyed them like ships of Tarshish  
shattered by an east wind.

8 As we have heard,  
so have we seen  
in the city of the LORD Almighty,  
in the city of our God:  
God makes her secure forever.  
Selah

9 Within your temple, O God,  
we meditate on your unfailing love.

10 Like your name, O God,  
your praise reaches to the ends of the earth;  
your right hand is filled with righteousness.

11 Mount Zion rejoices,  
the villages of Judah are glad  
because of your judgments.

12 Walk about Zion, go around her,  
count her towers,

13 consider well her ramparts,  
view her citadels,  
that you may tell of them to the next generation.

14 For this God is our God for ever and ever

**Psalm 84** (NLT) *For the choir director: A psalm of the descendants of Korah, to be accompanied by a stringed instrument.*

- 1 How lovely is your dwelling place,  
O LORD Almighty.
- 2 I long, yes, I faint with longing  
to enter the courts of the LORD.  
With my whole being, body and soul,  
I will shout joyfully to the living God.
- 3 Even the sparrow finds a home there,  
and the swallow builds her nest  
and raises her young--  
at a place near your altar,  
O LORD Almighty, my King and my God!
- 4 How happy are those who can live in your house,  
always singing your praises.

*Interlude*

- 5 Happy are those who are strong in the LORD,  
who set their minds on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem.
- 6 When they walk through the Valley of Weeping,  
it will become a place of refreshing springs,  
where pools of blessing collect after the rains!
- 7 They will continue to grow stronger,  
and each of them will appear before God in Jerusalem.
- 8 O LORD God Almighty, hear my prayer.  
Listen, O God of Israel.

*Interlude*

- 9 O God, look with favor upon the king, our protector!  
Have mercy on the one you have anointed.
- 10 A single day in your courts  
is better than a thousand anywhere else!  
I would rather be a gatekeeper in the house of my God  
than live the good life in the homes of the wicked.
- 11 For the LORD God is our light and protector.  
He gives us grace and glory.  
No good thing will the LORD withhold  
from those who do what is right.
- 12 O LORD Almighty,  
happy are those who trust in you.

**Psalm 87** (NLT)

*A psalm of the descendants of Korah. A song.*

- 1 On the holy mountain  
stands the city founded by the LORD.
- 2 He loves the city of Jerusalem  
more than any other city in Israel.
- 3 O city of God,  
what glorious things are said of you!

*Interlude*

- 4 I will record Egypt and Babylon  
among those who know me--  
also Philistia and Tyre, and even distant Ethiopia.  
They have all become citizens of Jerusalem!
- 5 And it will be said of Jerusalem,  
"Everyone has become a citizen here."  
And the Most High will personally bless this city.
- 6 When the LORD registers the nations,  
he will say, "This one has become  
a citizen of Jerusalem."

*Interlude*

- 7 At all the festivals, the people will sing,  
"The source of my life is in Jerusalem!"

**Psalm 122** (Holman) *A Prayer for Jerusalem  
A Davidic song of ascents.*

- 1 I rejoiced with those who said to me,  
"Let us go to the house of the LORD."
- 2 Our feet are standing  
within your gates, Jerusalem —
- 3 Jerusalem, built as a city [should be],  
solidly joined together,  
4 where the tribes, the tribes of the LORD, go up  
to give thanks to the name of the LORD.  
(This is an ordinance for Israel.)
- 5 There, thrones for judgment are placed,  
thrones of the house of David.
- 6 Pray for the peace of Jerusalem:  
"May those who love you prosper;  
7 may there be peace within your walls,  
prosperity within your fortresses."
- 8 Because of my brothers and friends,  
I will say, "Peace be with you."
- 9 Because of the house of the LORD our God,

**Psalm 126** (NLT) *A song for the ascent to  
Jerusalem.*

- 1 When the LORD restored  
his exiles to Jerusalem,  
it was like a dream!
- 2 We were filled with laughter,  
and we sang for joy.  
And the other nations said,  
"What amazing things  
the LORD has done for them."
- 3 Yes, the LORD has done amazing things for us!  
What joy!
- 4 Restore our fortunes, LORD,  
as streams renew the desert.
- 5 Those who plant in tears  
will harvest with shouts of joy.
- 6 They weep as they go to plant their seed,  
but they sing as they return with the harvest.

# *The Great Hallel*

## Psalm 115 (NIV)

- 1 Not to us, O LORD, not to us  
but to your name be the glory,  
because of your love and faithfulness.
- 2 Why do the nations say,  
"Where is their God?"
- 3 Our God is in heaven;  
he does whatever pleases him.
- 4 But their idols are silver and gold,  
made by the hands of men.
- 5 They have mouths, but cannot speak,  
eyes, but they cannot see;
- 6 they have ears, but cannot hear,  
noses, but they cannot smell;
- 7 they have hands, but cannot feel,  
feet, but they cannot walk;  
nor can they utter a sound  
with their throats.
- 8 Those who make them will be like them,  
and so will all who trust in them.
- 9 O house of Israel, trust in the LORD—  
he is their help and shield.
- 10 O house of Aaron, trust in the LORD—  
he is their help and shield.
- 11 You who fear him, trust in the LORD—  
he is their help and shield.
- 12 The LORD remembers us and will bless us:  
He will bless the house of Israel,  
he will bless the house of Aaron,  
13 he will bless those who fear the LORD—  
small and great alike.
- 14 May the LORD make you increase,  
both you and your children.
- 15 May you be blessed by the LORD,  
the Maker of heaven and earth.
- 16 The highest heavens belong to the LORD,  
but the earth he has given to man.
- 17 It is not the dead who praise the LORD,  
those who go down to silence;
- 18 it is we who extol the LORD,  
both now and forevermore.  
Praise the LORD.

## Psalm 116

- 1 I love the LORD, for he heard my voice;  
he heard my cry for mercy.
- 2 Because he turned his ear to me,  
I will call on him as long as I live.
- 3 The cords of death entangled me,  
the anguish of the grave came upon me;  
I was overcome by trouble and sorrow.
- 4 Then I called on the name of the LORD :  
"O LORD, save me!"
- 5 The LORD is gracious and righteous;  
our God is full of compassion.
- 6 The LORD protects the simple hearted;  
when I was in great need, he saved me.
- 7 Be at rest once more, O my soul,  
for the LORD has been good to you.
- 8 For you, O LORD, have delivered my soul from death,  
my eyes from tears,  
my feet from stumbling,  
9 that I may walk before the LORD  
in the land of the living.
- 10 I believed; therefore I said,  
"I am greatly afflicted."
- 11 And in my dismay I said,  
"All men are liars."
- 12 How can I repay the LORD  
for all his goodness to me?
- 13 I will lift up the cup of salvation  
and call on the name of the LORD.
- 14 I will fulfill my vows to the LORD  
in the presence of all his people.
- 15 Precious in the sight of the LORD  
is the death of his saints.
- 16 O LORD, truly I am your servant;  
I am your servant,  
the son of your maidservant ;  
you have freed me from my chains.
- 17 I will sacrifice a thank offering to you  
and call on the name of the LORD.
- 18 I will fulfill my vows to the LORD  
in the presence of all his people,  
19 in the courts of the house of the LORD—  
in your midst, O Jerusalem.  
Praise the LORD.

## Psalm 117

- 1 Praise the LORD, all you nations;  
extol him, all you peoples.
- 2 For great is his love toward us,  
and the faithfulness of the LORD  
endures forever.  
Praise the LORD.

## Psalm 118

- 1 Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good;  
his love endures forever.
- 2 Let Israel say:  
"His love endures forever."
- 3 Let the house of Aaron say:  
"His love endures forever."
- 4 Let those who fear the LORD say:  
"His love endures forever."
- 5 In my anguish I cried to the LORD,  
and he answered by setting me free.
- 6 The LORD is with me; I will not be afraid.  
What can man do to me?
- 7 The LORD is with me; he is my helper.  
I will look in triumph on my enemies.
- 8 It is better to take refuge in the LORD  
than to trust in man.
- 9 It is better to take refuge in the LORD  
than to trust in princes.
- 10 All the nations surrounded me,  
but in the name of the LORD  
I cut them off.
- 11 They surrounded me on every side,  
but in the name of the LORD  
I cut them off.
- 12 They swarmed around me like bees,  
but they died out  
as quickly as burning thorns;  
in the name of the LORD I cut them off.
- 13 I was pushed back and about to fall,  
but the LORD helped me.
- 14 The LORD is my strength and my song;  
he has become my salvation.
- 15 Shouts of joy and victory  
resound in the tents of the righteous:  
"The LORD's right hand  
has done mighty things!"
- 16 The LORD's right hand is lifted high;  
the LORD's right hand  
has done mighty things!"
- 17 I will not die but live,  
and will proclaim  
what the LORD has done.
- 18 The LORD has chastened me severely,  
but he has not given me over to death.
- 19 Open for me the gates of righteousness;  
I will enter and give thanks to the LORD.
- 20 This is the gate of the LORD  
through which the righteous may enter.
- 21 I will give you thanks,  
for you answered me;  
you have become my salvation.
- 22 The stone the builders rejected  
has become the capstone;
- 23 the LORD has done this,  
and it is marvelous in our eyes.
- 24 This is the day the LORD has made;  
let us rejoice and be glad in it.
- 25 O LORD, save us;  
O LORD, grant us success.
- 26 Blessed is he  
who comes in the name of the LORD.  
From the house of the LORD  
we bless you.
- 27 The LORD is God,  
and he has made his light shine upon us.  
With boughs in hand,  
join in the festal procession  
up to the horns of the altar.
- 28 You are my God,  
and I will give you thanks;  
you are my God, and I will exalt you.
- 29 Give thanks to the LORD,  
for he is good;  
his love endures forever.

## *Time for personal reflection (Day 16):*

Though the traditional Passover celebration ends with a song of praise from the “Great Hillel,” Schwartz chose a song of lament for Jesus and his followers to sing in *Godspell*. How does this Psalm fit into the action of the play, and the lives of the disciples, at the moment it is sung in the show? Was this an appropriate choice? Why or why not?

What is the significance of substituting the word “harps” with “lives?”

Both Psalm 137 and the poem “On the Willows” talk of being enslaved and persecuted in a foreign land and questioning, “How can we sing?” As Christians, how can we sing while being enslaved and persecuted in a foreign land? How important is it that I be able to sing in this type of situation?

Today’s society makes us believe we should always feel comfortable in who we are (our skin), with our friends and family (our community), and in the work we do. Society claims that I should always be able to do it “my way.” But as a Christian in a fallen world, or a prisoner in a foreign land, should I be doing it “my way” or “His way?” Do I find myself often having a problem with doing it “His way” and allowing myself to go where He is leading me, even if it’s uncomfortable to me?

Which one of the “Great Hillel” should I be singing before the show? At the end of the show? At the end of the day? At the end of the tour?

## *Time for personal reflection...*

How important will it be for the good of the group not to do it “my way” this summer?  
What do I need to do to remember not to do it “my way” but God’s way?