

# PSALM 126

It was with reference to some great and surprising deliverance of the people of God out of bondage and distress that this psalm was penned, most likely their return out of Babylon in Ezra's time. Though Babylon be not mentioned here (as it is, Psalm 137) yet their captivity there was the most remarkable captivity both in itself and as their return out of it was typical of our redemption by Christ. Probably this psalm was penned by Ezra, or some of the prophets that came up with the first. We read of singers of the children of Asaph, that famous psalmist, who returned then, ~~EBL~~ Ezra 2:41. It being a song of ascents, in which the same things are twice repeated with advancement (v. 2, 3, and v. 4, 5), it is put here among the rest of the psalms that bear that title.

**I.** Those that had returned out of captivity are here called upon to be thankful (v. 1-3).

**II.** Those that were yet remaining in captivity are here prayed for (v. 4) and encouraged (v. 5, 6). It will be easy, in singing this psalm, to apply it either to any particular deliverance wrought for the church or our own land or to the great work of our salvation by Christ.

## ~~EBL~~ PSALM 126:1-3

### THE DELIVERANCE FROM CAPTIVITY

#### *A song of degrees.*

While the people of Israel were captives in Babylon their harps were hung upon the willow-trees, for then God called to weeping and mourning, then he mourned unto them and they lamented; but now that their captivity is turned they resume their harps; Providence pipes to them, and they dance. Thus must we accommodate ourselves to all the dispensations of Providence and be suitably affected with them. And the harps are never more melodiously tunable than after such a melancholy disuse. The long want of mercies greatly sweetens their return. Here is,

**1.** The deliverance God has wrought for them: He *turned again the captivity of Zion*. It is possible that Zion may be in captivity for the punishment of her degeneracy, but her captivity shall be turned again when the end is answered and the work designed by it is effected. Cyrus, for reasons of state, proclaimed liberty to God's captives, and yet it was *the Lord's doing*, according to his word many years before. God sent them into captivity, not as dross is put into the fire to be consumed, but as gold to be refined. Observe, The release of Israel is called *the turning again of the captivity of Zion*, the holy hill, where God's tabernacle and dwelling-place were; for the restoring of their sacred interests, and the reviving of the public exercise of their religion, were the most valuable advantages of their return out of captivity.

**2.** The pleasing surprise that this was to them. They were amazed at it; it came so suddenly that at first they were in confusion, not knowing what to make of it, nor what it was tending to: "We thought ourselves *like men that dream*; we thought it too good news to be true, and began to question whether we were well awake or no, and whether it was not still" (as sometimes it had been to the prophets) "only a representation of it in vision," as St. Peter for a while thought his deliverance was, <sup><411></sup>Acts 12:9. Sometimes the people of God are thus prevented with the blessings of his goodness before they are aware. *We were like those that are recovered to health* (so Dr. Hammond reads it); "such a comfortable happy change it was to us, as life from the dead or sudden ease from exquisite pain; we thought ourselves in a new world." And the surprise of it put them into such an ecstasy and transport of joy that they could scarcely contain themselves within the bounds of decency in the expressions of it: *Our mouth was filled with laughter and our tongue with singing*. Thus they gave vent to their joy, gave glory to their God, and gave notice to all about them what wonders God had wrought for them. Those that were laughed at now laugh and a *new song is put into their mouths*. It was a laughter of joy in God, not scorn of their enemies.

**3.** The notice which their neighbours took of it: *They said among the heathen, Jehovah, the God of Israel, has done great things* for that people, such as our gods cannot do for us. The heathen had observed their calamity and had triumphed in it, <sup><218></sup>Jeremiah 22:8, 9; <sup><110></sup>Psalms 137:7. Now they could not but observe their deliverance and admire that. It put a reputation upon those that had been scorned and despised, and made them look considerable; besides, it turned greatly to the honour of God, and

extorted from those that set up other gods in competition with him an acknowledgment of his wisdom, power, and providence.

4. The acknowledgments which they themselves made of it, v. 3. The heathen were but spectators, and spoke of it only as matter of news; they had no part nor lot in the matter; but the people of God spoke of it as sharers in it,

(1.) With application: “He has *done great things for us*, things that we are interested in and have advantage by.” Thus it is comfortable speaking of the redemption Christ has wrought out as wrought out for us. *Who loved me, and gave himself for me.*

(2.) With affection: “*Whereof we are glad.* The heathen are amazed at it, and some of them angry, but we are glad.” While Israel went a whoring from their God joy was forbidden them (~~300~~Hosea 9:1); but now that the iniquity of Jacob was purged by the captivity, and their sin taken away, now God makes them to rejoice. It is the repenting reforming people that are, and shall be, the rejoicing people. Observe here,

[1.] God's appearances for his people are to be looked upon as great things.

[2.] God is to be eyed as the author of all the great things done for the church.

[3.] It is good to observe how the church's deliverances are for us, that we may rejoice in them.

## ~~106~~ PSALM 126:4-6

### HOPE FOR THE SORROWFUL

These verses look forward to the mercies that were yet wanted. Those that had come out of captivity were still in distress, even in their own land (~~100~~Nehemiah 1:3), and many yet remained in Babylon; and therefore they rejoiced with trembling, and bore upon their hearts the grievances that were yet to be redressed. We have here,

1. A prayer for the perfecting of their deliverance (v. 4): “*Turn again our captivity.* Let those that have returned to their own land be eased of the burdens which they are yet groaning under. Let those that remain in Babylon have their hearts stirred up, as ours were, to take the benefit of

the liberty granted.” The beginnings of mercy are encouragements to us to pray for the completing of it. And while we are here in this world there will still be matter for prayer, even when we are most furnished with matter for praise. And, when we are free and in prosperity ourselves, we must not be unmindful of our brethren that are in trouble and under restraint. The bringing of those that were yet in captivity to join with their brethren that had returned would be as welcome to both sides as streams of water in those countries, which, lying far south, were parched and dry. As cold water to a thirsty soul, so would this good news be from that far country, <sup>4155</sup>Proverbs 25:25.

**2.** A promise for their encouragement to wait for it, assuring them that, though they had now a sorrowful time, yet it would end well. But the promise is expressed generally, that all the saints may comfort themselves with this confidence, that their seedness of tears will certainly end in a harvest of joy at last, v. 5, 6.

**(1.)** Suffering saints have a seedness of tears. They are in tears often; they share in the calamities of human life, and commonly have a greater share in them than others. But they *sow in tears*; they do the duty of an afflicted state and so answer the intentions of the providences they are under. Weeping must not hinder sowing; when we suffer ill we must be doing well. Nay, as the ground is by the rain prepared for the seed, and the husbandman sometimes chooses to sow in the wet, so we must improve times of affliction, as disposing us to repentance, and prayer, and humiliation. Nay, there are tears which are themselves the seed that we must sow, tears of sorrow for sin, our own and others, tears of sympathy with the afflicted church, and the tears of tenderness in prayer and under the word. These are precious seed, such as the husbandman sows when corn is dear and he has but little for his family, and therefore weeps to part with it, yet buries it under ground, in expectation of receiving it again with advantage. Thus does a good man sow in tears.

**(2.)** They shall have a harvest of joy. The troubles of the saints will not last always, but, when they have done their work, shall have a happy period. The captives in Babylon were long sowing in tears, but at length they were brought forth with joy, and then they reaped the benefit of their patient suffering, and brought their sheaves with them to their own land, in their experiences of the goodness of God to them. Job, and Joseph, and David, and many others, had harvests of joy after a sorrowful seedness. Those that

sow in the tears of godly sorrow shall reap in the joy of a sealed pardon and a settled peace. Those that *sow to the spirit*, in this vale of tears, *shall of the spirit reap life everlasting*, and that will be a joyful harvest indeed. *Blessed are those that mourn, for they shall be for ever comforted.*