

# PSALMS

## Chapter 126

*Restore Our Fortunes, O LORD*

A Song of Ascents.

**When the LORD restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dream. 2 Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with shouts of joy; then they said among the nations, “The LORD has done great things for them.” 3 The LORD has done great things for us; we are glad. 4 Restore our fortunes, O LORD, like streams in the Negeb! 5 Those who sow in tears shall reap with shouts of joy! 6 He who goes out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing, shall come home with shouts of joy, bringing his sheaves with him.**

**Ps 126** A song of joy for restoration to Zion. If not composed for those who returned from Babylonian exile (see Ezra and Nehemiah)—the place of exile is not named—it surely served to voice the joy of that restored community (cf. Ps 42–43; 84; 137). The psalm divides into two stanzas of four (Hebrew) lines each, with their initial lines sharing a common theme. Thematic unity is further served by repetition (cf. vv. 2–3) and other key words (“the LORD,” “songs of joy,” “carrying”). References to God’s action (vv. 1, 3) frame the first stanza, while v. 2 offers exposition. (CSB)

Likely written after the captives returned from the Babylonian exile. (TLSB)

Format: Vv 1–3, celebrating restoration; vv 4–6, reaping joy. (TLSB)

The 126<sup>th</sup> psalm is a psalm of thanks for the deliverance from the captivity in Babylon. Whether it was made following that captivity or prior to is (as a prophecy for the comfort and hope for the coming deliverance, so that they may not despair) is of no concern. At the end the psalmist concludes that it happens-and always happens-to the saints that they first must suffer before they can rejoice. Similarly, the world first rejoices before they get their suffering.

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Therefore, the saints sow with tears to reap afterward with joy. But (he says), such seed is excellent and precious seed to bring forth such fruit. Before weeping, one cannot see that it so precious and worthy before God. but God loves his saints so much that he regards even their death (which is truly the abominable, accursed seed of the world) as more precious than all of the world’s treasures and goods. (Reading the Psalms with Luther)

**126:1–3** Joy over restoration experienced. (CSB)

Even their adversaries acknowledge the greatness of the Lord’s deed on their behalf. (PBC)

**126:1** *restored the fortunes of Zion*. This translation and its alternative have essentially the same result. (CSB)

Restoration of the captives after the Babylonian exile may well be the setting for this psalm (cf Ezr, Ne). (TLSB)

This verse suggests that this psalm may have originated as a celebration of the return of the captives from Babylon. But it may also be translated as a more general reference to the Lord's restoration of Zion's fortunes. (PBC)

*dream.* The wonder and joy of the reality were so marvelous that they hardly dared believe it. It seemed more like the dreams with which they had so long been tantalized. (CSB)

Like dreaming sleepwalkers, who wake to find that the dream is true, the captives return to Jerusalem. (TLSB)

**126:2** The twofold effect: joy for those who returned and honor for God among the nations.(CSB)

**126:3** *we are glad* – “Glad” is far too weak for the form (s.v. Ps. 48:11) given the circumstances; it would convey more of the sense of joy, rejoicing, or taking delight in what the Lord had done. (A Commentary on the Psalms - Ross)

**126:4–6** Prayer for restoration to be completed. (CSB)

**126:4** *Restore our fortunes.*† The same Hebrew phrase as in v. 1. Either complete the repatriation of exiles or fully restore the security and prosperity of former times. (CSB)

*like streams in the Negev.* Which are bone-dry in summer, until the winter rains renew their flow. (CSB)

Sudden storms turn dry riverbeds into flowing streams, causing flowers to appear. So God's mercy overflows to the people caught in the barren life of exile. Cf Is 41:17–20. (TLSB)

**126:5–6** An apt metaphorical portrayal of the joy already experienced and the joy anticipated. – Notice the intricate interlocked parallelism of these two verses. (PBC)

*in tears ... weeping.* Even when sowing is accompanied by trouble or sorrow, harvest brings joy. For a related figure see 20:5. (CSB)

Here the long, hard toil of the farmer between planting and harvest is the point of comparison. Before the harvest is gathered, before the restoration is complete, there is a lot of work to be done by the Lord's co-workers. They must toil in the fields in the heat of the day in the sweat of their brow before the harvest can finally be gathered in. (PBC)

**126:6** Beginning of the exile was in tears, but the seeds sown then bring this joyful harvest as the captives return home. First comes struggle as they support one another in the midst of hardship, then comes relief. Augustine: “What shall we sow? Good works. Works of mercy are our seeds. ... [The farmer] looks to the sky, sees it lowering, shivers with cold, nevertheless goes forth, and sows ... [not] awaiting sunshine” (NPNF 1 8:605). (TLSB)

**Ps 126** May God give us the expectation that times of sudden refreshing will come from Him. Perhaps now you are in a time of sowing with bitter tears; do not despair of His grace. Trust in His power to do the unimaginable through overflowing kindness. • By faith we rejoice, O Lord, in

the sowing of Jesus' body on Good Friday and the harvest of blessings He prepared on Easter morn. Amen. (TLSB)