

## Virtual Prayer Meeting for Kelham Baptist Church

April 22, 2020

SONG: "To God Be the Glory"

<https://youtu.be/eHKl485-ggc>

SONG: "What a Friend We Have in Jesus"

<https://youtu.be/Zsp5exNyd94>

Here is another version, radically different, that I enjoyed:

<https://youtu.be/eHKl485-ggc>

**Psalm 126 falls into the group of Psalms called the "songs of degrees"** or songs of ascent. We have talked before about various theories of what those are and what significance they had. There are fifteen of them. Several are attributed to David, one *to or for* Solomon, and the rest are anonymous (some suggest written by Hezekiah when God extended his life fifteen years, Isa. 38:1-8). Verse 20 of Isaiah 38 indicates Hezekiah determined to write and sing songs to memorialize the event (note the personal pronoun "my"): "The LORD *was ready* to save me: therefore we will sing my songs to the stringed instruments all the days of our life in the house of the LORD."

**Some suggest the Levites sang these psalms** while ascending the fifteen steps ("degrees" is literally the Hebrew word for steps, or "degrees," in the passage from Isaiah 38—we think the "degrees" were a staircase on which the shadow of the sun rested as the day progressed, thus giving a measure of time) from the Court of the Women to the Court of the Men in the Temple, but we have no independent verification that those steps even existed.

The fifteen psalms are clearly a unit within the Psalms. Their organization stands out. I have reproduced it graphically below. Most commentators are of the opinion that pilgrims to the annual festivals in Jerusalem (Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles) sang these psalms as they ascended to Jerusalem and the Temple (cf. 2 Kings 23:2; Neh. 12:37; Pss. 42:4; 122:1–2; 132:7). The psalm by Solomon forms the centerpiece and skeletal core. On each side of it are two psalms by David, with the unclaimed psalms filling the balance.

### ARRANGEMENT OF THE PSALMS OF DEGREES

120—Anonymous

121—Anonymous

**122—David**

123—Anonymous

**124—David**

125—Anonymous

126—Anonymous

**127—Solomon** (*by or for—midpoint of the psalms of degrees*)

128—Anonymous

129— Anonymous

130— Anonymous

**131—David**

132— Anonymous

**133—David**

134—Anonymous

**Psalm 126 begins with a setting:** “When the LORD turned again the captivity of Zion” (vs. 1). We are tempted, with liberal scholars who reject early authorship of the Psalms (and Davidic authorship in general), to see this as a post-Captivity psalm, composed during or after the time of Ezra following the Babylonian Captivity. That is not necessary, however. “Captivity” has a broad range of usage. Mitchell Dahood in the very liberal Anchor Bible Commentary offered the translation, “restore the fortunes of,” making it “unnecessary to see in this phrase a mark of exilic literature” (Hamilton, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, Vol. 2, p. 910). The idea

would then be that Israel had fallen on hard times, and God had intervened. "LORD" once more reminds us of God's covenanted relationship with Israel. God is ever-faithful, and that particular divine name reinforces that to us. "Zion" almost always refers to spiritual Israel rather than merely the physical place, Jerusalem. It is like the difference between referring to Israel as opposed to Jacob (cf. Gen. 32:28).

**Note that the Psalm says "the LORD turned again" (Ps. 126:1)** their "captivity." It was not something they did; it was God's sovereign action. See something similar in Acts 11:18, when the leaders in Jerusalem heard of the salvation of Cornelius and his house: "Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life." Acts 5:31 speaks of God's *giving* "repentance unto Israel." Second Timothy 2:25 speaks of God *giving* "repentance to the acknowledging of the truth." Repentance is a gracious gift of God. All of us deserve condemnation. We do not seek God (Rom. 3:11); He seeks us (Luke 19:10: "The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost").

**The metaphor in Psalm 126 used** to describe Israel's response is one of the classics of the Psalms: "We were like them that dream" (vs. 1). We have all had dreams so real we thought they actually happened. When we awoke we were not sure we were awake. Sometimes dreams seem too good to be true. That is how the nation felt when God turned them around and at the same time turned their fortunes. I am neither a prophet nor the son of a prophet, but it may be that one of the things God is doing through this pandemic is showing us as a nation that we still need Him and His care. He may be drawing us away from the temporal pleasures and enjoyments of prosperity back to Himself. More people think of God in hard times than prosperous times. Jesus said that "the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things entering in, choke the word, and it becometh unfruitful" (Mark 4:19). Obviously, not everyone in every place is turning to God. A division is appearing between the faithful and those not there yet. I recently heard one governor say when the infection rate in his state went down, "God didn't do this. Faith didn't do this. We did this."

**“Then was our mouth filled with laughter” (Ps. 126:2)** vividly pictures the relief and overflowing joy when God turned the nation around. “Filled” means full or satisfied. It’s a graphic picture of a mouth spilling out joyous laughter and relief. We’ve all come through difficult times and then breathed a great sigh of relief. This is so much more. “Our tongue with singing” draws from the verb “filled” and pictures the joyous thanksgiving of God’s people at His deliverance.

**Why do human beings sing?** Google “psychology of singing” and you will find all kinds of answers. Researchers have done numerous studies on it. H. J. Chong did a study in 2010 of college students and it revealed that 88.3% of the respondents said they enjoyed singing. In the seven subcategories, “self-expression” garnered the most respondents for why they enjoyed singing. One recent study revealed that singing is beneficial in pain relief as it releases endorphins and dopamine. Singing also distracts us from more negative emotions. After singing, studies show cortisol, a stress hormone, has reduced levels. Those benefits are just the tip of the iceberg. Spiritually singing allows us to express our thanks and praise to God in a way that mere words cannot.

**“Singing” (Ps. 126:2) is much more than** mere singing. The word first appears in Leviticus 9:24, where it is used for “the shout of jubilation” (White, *TWOT*, Vol. 2, p. 851). “This usage of the term to describe the joy of Israel at God’s saving acts is carried on throughout the OT... The overwhelming respect of the verb is toward God.... to God the cry is raised.” Israel’s song, White says, may have been “more similar to jubilant shouting.”

**“Then” (Ps. 126:2) picks up the time** setting from earlier in the verse and from verse 1, “When.” When the LORD turned His people, the “heathen,” or *goyim*, the nations of the world, around them, said, “The LORD hath done great things for them.” Surely God delivers His people with evangelistic intent in mind. Note the use again of “LORD,” Jehovah, the covenant God of Israel. The nations around them recognized that Jehovah, Israel’s God, had accomplished amazing things for His people. Recall the testimony of Rahab in the Book of Joshua: “She said unto the men,

I know that the LORD hath given you the land, and that your terror is fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land faint because of you. For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red sea for you, when ye came out of Egypt; and what ye did unto the two kings of the Amorites, that *were* on the other side Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom ye utterly destroyed” (1:9-10). Pagans recognized God’s hand of blessing on Israel. God wanted them to see who He is.

**“Great things” (Ps. 126:2)** translates a word that means “magnified” or “important.” Verse 3 follows hard on verse 2 and almost seems as if realization suddenly dawned on God’s people: “The LORD hath done great things for us.” It’s almost as if after they heard their neighbors vocalizing how God had done great things for them that their own eyes were opened to the gracious acts of God on their behalf. “Hey, God really did do great things for us.” That may be stretching the point, but sometimes we do not realize how good God has been to us until others remind us. “We are glad” translates a word that “denotes being glad or joyful with the whole disposition” (Waltke, *TWOT*, Vol. 2, p. 879). A rough vernacular translation might be, “We were tickled pink,” though that is wholly inadequate to portray their rejoicing.

**Remembering “when” (vs. 1) and “then” (vs. 2)** leads to present application. The whole of the psalm to this point recalled time past in which God delivered His people. Now consideration must be turned to the present: “Turn again our captivity, O LORD, as the streams in the south” (vs. 4). All through the Bible, the people of God are called on to remember. The word “remember” appears 146 x in the King James and often calls God’s people to remember both good and bad examples. Paul told the Romans, “Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope” (15:4). The Book of Hebrews used this powerfully in chapters 11 and 12. Chapter 11 reminds us of the heroes of the faith. Chapter 12 calls us to “run with patience the race that is set before us” (vs. 2). They did it. We must as well. God’s faithfulness to His people is graphically displayed in the examples of Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Sara, and the others for us to consider. Kidner noted that in Psalm 126:4, “Memory, so far

from slipping into nostalgia, now give impetus to hope” (*Psalms 73—150*, p. 439).

**In verse 4 of Psalm 126, remembering** how they felt when God had turned them previously, the Psalmist asks God to “turn again our captivity as the streams in the desert” (vs. 4). The imagery here seems to be to the sudden and temporary streams in the Negev in the south of Israel that would appear when it rained. Overnight rivers would roar through dry gulches and gullies, bringing floods of water to parched, dry ground. In Isaiah 44:3, God used this imagery as an invitation to His people: “For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground: I will pour my spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring.” Kidner observed that “the two image of renewal (4b, 5-6) are not only striking: they are complementary. The first of them is all suddenness, a sheer gift from heaven; the second is slow and arduous with man allotted a crucial part to play in it... [a sudden downpour] can also turn the surrounding desert into a place of grass and flowers overnight” (p. 440). This is a plea for God’s immediate intervention and the envisioned result. If God would but turn us like the streams of the desert, prosperity and blessing would return. That’s a pointed thought for us today as well, is it not? God controls His world and everything in it.

**In verse 5, the picture turns to the intensity** of the seeking of the nation for God’s blessing. Farmers and gardeners know the heartbreak of a lost harvest, doomed to wither and die for lack of moisture. The Great Depression saw hundreds of thousands of acres of crops in the Midwest dry up and simply blow away from drought. Imagine a farmer with little money and little seed trying to eke out a crop in such conditions. Do you have a difficult time seeing him sowing “in tears”? I don’t. Many small farmers in the past borrowed money on the hoped-for harvest to finance the purchase of seed for the crop. Every seed was “precious” (vs. 6), costly, from a word meaning to “drag out.” It was an effort, an expense, a sacrifice.

**This harvest, however, a spiritual harvest** seeking God’s blessing, was certain: “shall reap in joy” (vs. 5). God blesses the seed that is sown, His Word. Jesus used the same symbol in the parable of the sower and the seed in Matthew 13:3 (cf. Luke 8:11: “The seed is the word of God”).

Whereas verse 5 speaks of “they,” verse 6 speaks of the individual, “he.” In verse 5, the sowers have the assurance of a harvest. Recall Jesus’ remark to the disciples in John 4, when He saw the men of Samaria coming after the woman at the well told them about Him: “One soweth, and another reapeth. I sent you to reap that whereon ye bestowed no labour: other men laboured, and ye are entered into their labours” (vss. 37-38). We sow and reap, certain only that God will bless His Word. That is the assurance of Psalm 126:6. The ultimate outcome is sure: “doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him.” The harvest will come. We must persevere.

**Kidner’s summary is worth recording:** “Miracles of the past it bids us treat as measures of the future; dry places as potential rivers; hard toil and good seed as the certain prelude to harvest.”

Song: “Ho, Everyone That is Thirsty”

<https://youtu.be/GQCyfSNB9iU>

Song: “Bringing in the Sheaves”

<https://youtu.be/heddxYa1pPY>

A more classical version of the same song that I like a lot!

<https://youtu.be/p7yMUlezLSE>

### **Prayer Requests:**

Shirley McEver—on antibiotics/laid off

Jolene Rogers—health

Johnnie Hughes—health/upcoming MRI