

Israel's Place in the Plan of God  
 The Songs of Ascent Psalms, 120—134  
 by Dr. David L. Cooper

## Psalm 126

### The Two Restorations of Israel To The Land of The Fathers

Psalm 126 divides into two equal sections:

- I. Israel's return from Babylonian captivity (vss. 1-3)
- II. Israel's return to God in the end of the age (vss. 4-6)

1. When Jehovah brought back those that returned to Zion, We were like unto them that dream.
2. Then was our mouth filled with laughter, And our tongue with singing: Then said they among the nations, Jehovah hath done great things for them.
3. Jehovah hath done great things for us, Whereof we are glad.
4. Turn again our captivity, O Jehovah, As the streams in the South.
5. They that sow in tears shall reap in joy.
6. He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing seed for sowing, Shall doubtless come again with joy, bringing his sheaves with *him*.

### Israel's Return From Babylonian Captivity

In the books of Ezra and Nehemiah we have a full account of Israel's return from Babylonian captivity at the expiration of the seventy years of exile. In the concluding verses of II Chronicles, chapter 36, we have a brief statement concerning this return as ordered by Cyrus, the king of Persia.

The author of the psalm, whose identity we do not know, was inspired to write this, one of the most beautiful of all the psalms. He attributes Israel's return to the land of the fathers to the action and overruling providence of God.

One should read carefully Isaiah 44:24—45:7, 11-13. This passage is a forecast that God would use Cyrus, the king of the Medo-Persian Empire, in sending the exiles back to their own land. This prophecy was written from between one hundred and fifty and two hundred years before the event. It was by the Spirit of God that Isaiah made this prediction.

God overrules in the lives of His people—the individual or the group—and works out His plans and purposes for them. The more completely people are surrendered to do the will of the Lord, the more glorious are the plans, the lives, and the labors of those who are thus providentially being used for God's glory.

Approximately fifty thousand Jews came back from Babylon under the leadership of Joshua, the high priest, and Zerubbabel, the governor of the house of David. All could have come back, as we see from the Book of Ezra; but many of the Jews had settled down to a commercial life and had business interests in

Babylon and its civilization, so that when the opportunity came to return they were not willing to go. But we praise God that there was a remnant that loved God, His truth, and His service and worship. Those came back.

Those who came back were as men who dream. From the human standpoint, it was impossible for them to return from their captivity, but God had overruled and worked out their problem for them and sent them back on time. Thus the marvelous, rapid movement of events when the time came caused the Jews to be like dreamers.

Notwithstanding the fact that it seemed unreal to them that they should be back in the land of their fathers, their mouths were filled with laughter and their tongues with singing. They, doubtless, were praising God for His marvelous work in their behalf.

Even the heathen in their pagan blindness could look on from the sidelines and see that it was Jehovah who had overruled in the lives of His people and had brought them back to their own land. Thus it was an open secret among them that such were their convictions regarding their restoration to the land of their fathers.

In verse 3, the psalmist chimes in and says, in effect, "Yes, the heathen are correct. God has done wonderful things for us."

#### Israel's Final Return To The Land And Restoration To God's Favor

In the last three verses of Psalm 126 the sacred writer, having seen what God did for Israel in bringing *him* back from the land of Babylon, looks forward out over the world and sees the nation of Israel scattered among the peoples of the earth. Taking his stand upon the promises of God that He will bring His people back and establish them in the land of their fathers, the psalmist begins, being inspired of the Lord to do so, to pray for their restoration in the end time. Thus he entreated God saying, "Turn again our captivity, O Jehovah, As the streams in the South." Prayer changes things; prayer brings victory. Let us always remember these facts.

When I was in the State of Israel in '49 and '50, I had the glorious opportunity of going down into the southern part of the country, which is called the Negev. While on that tour, I saw along one of the roadways, large metal pipes, water mains. I learned that these were to be part of an irrigation system that was being installed in the country. Artesian well water has been obtained by sinking deep wells. Thus there is beginning an irrigation system in the Negev such as has never been dreamed of before.

About a week or ten days before I left the State of Israel in '50, I was in Jerusalem, with a group of five Jewish men, all of whom had Hebrew Bibles. Providentially, I opened mine to Psalm 126. I read this passage in the original language and then translated it. When I came to verse 4, I rendered it as I had never done before. Here is my translation: "Turn again our captivity, O Jehovah, As the streams down in the Negev." Then flashed through my mind the real meaning of this verse. I had been down in the Negev on other occasions when I visited Palestine. This part that is called Negev comprises forty-seven percent of the land west of the Jordan known as Palestine. This is a dry, arid, desert country. Average rainfall, according to statistics which I have read, is something like three inches during the year, whereas some few sections of it get as much as eight inches.

There are no streams throughout that whole section. There may be, and are, wadies down which a flash flood may send some water rolling toward lower levels. Such rolls of water are swallowed up by the sands and the thirsty ground. In the psalmist's days there were no irrigation systems and no streams in that part of the country. There are a few remains of some irrigation work that was installed during the time of the Crusaders, but the remains of such a system are very meager indeed. When, therefore, the author spoke in Psalm 126, verse 4, he had no historical background from which to view the situation and from which to make his prediction.

But he did see the country with an irrigation system—the irrigation system, I am persuaded, which is now being installed, and which will be developed in the future. In view of all the historical facts, I am of the profound conviction that the prophet was carried forward in vision by the Spirit of God and saw that which has just begun to be developed since the outbreak of the Arabic-Jewish war in 1948. It was only by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit that the author of this psalm could see what would occur twenty-five hundred years in the future.

The writer recognized the fact that God had brought them back from Babylonian captivity, and that the Almighty is the One who overrules in all history. Thus he prays for God to bring Israel back from his world-wide captivity and to turn the nation, just as those in charge of an irrigation system turn the water and make it go in any canal or lateral desired. They likewise can control the volume and the timing of the whole system. Thus the psalmist calls upon God to intervene for Israel in bringing him back from his world-wide dispersion.

But in Israel's return to the land, there is a seed-sowing that must be accomplished, which is referred to in verses 5 and 6. This seed-sowing is the sowing of the Word of God, the only kind of seed-sowing that can possibly be connected with Israel's return to the land and re-establishment in the home of their fathers. These verses refer to the sowing of the seed in Israel now, while she is returning to the land. Unfortunately, these verses have been torn from their connection and applied to the sowing of the seed, the Word of God, anywhere and among various groups of people.

While such an application may be made of the passage, its real meaning is an undoubted reference to the giving forth of the Word of God to the Jews now.

The person who engages in this task does so in tears, there being many heartaches and disappointments. Now is the time of seed-sowing. This is not the period for reaping. That comes later. There will be an abundant harvest. Those who sow now will reap the greatest harvest possible in the form of an innumerable host of people who will be led to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ by the 144,000 Jews to whom we are now giving the truth in our seed sowing throughout all Israel in this generation.

May the Lord stir our hearts and energize our spirits to do greater and better service for Him in the field of Israel!