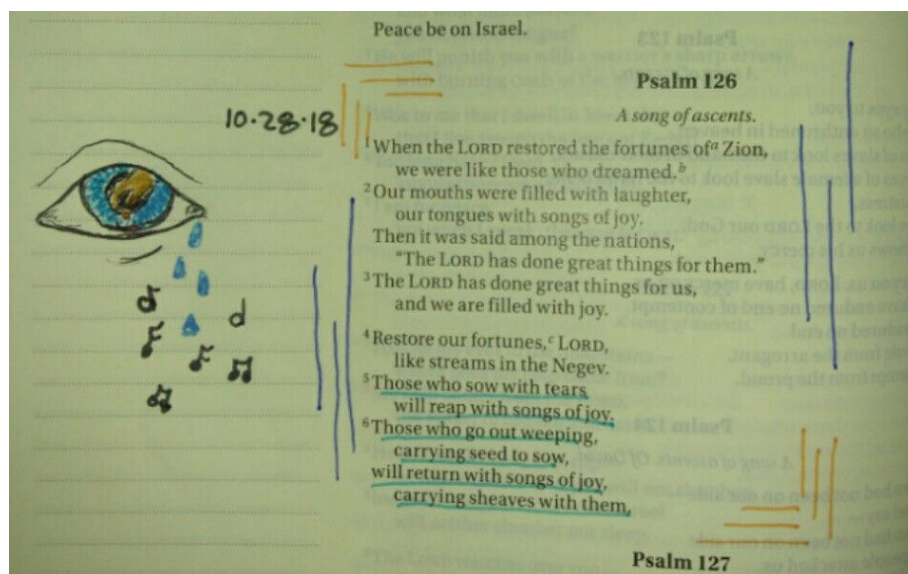


(Psalm 126) "The LORD has done great things for us!"

Psalm 126 is a song that looks back to when the captives returned to Jerusalem following their long exile in Babylon. They had suffered so much, and now they suddenly found themselves back in their homeland, back in Jerusalem, back in the beloved city of God. Just like that, God had delivered them. This is a psalm that we need during times of crisis. It is a much needed reminder of how God brings us from tears to joy.

The psalm basically has two stanzas with two main ideas. **The first stanza, the Israelites rejoice and are amazed at how God has helped them in the past, (verses 1-3). And the second stanza is a prayer for God to complete the process of their return. In other words, they will trust God to do it again, (verses 4-6).**



I. Be Amazed, Look What the Lord Has Done (vv. 1-3)

- A. When God delivers you big time, it can feel like you're in a dream. That's what we see in verse 1: **"When the Lord brought back the captives to Zion, we were like men who dreamed."** (**Psalm 126:1**)

B. **“Our mouths were filled with laughter, our tongues with songs of joy.” (Psalm 126:2)** Before you can understand their laughter and joy, you must first understand their sorrow. The people of Israel experienced great sorrow and mourning in while in exile.

1. Jews in Babylonian Captivity

“By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion. There on the poplars we hung our harps, for there our captors asked us for songs, our tormentors demanded songs of joy; they said, ‘Sing us one of the songs of Zion!’ How can we sing the songs of the Lord while in a foreign land?” (Psalm 137:1-4)



Because of the idolatry and failure to observe the directives of the Lord, the Holy Days, the Sabbaths, allowing the land to rest and releasing slaves, every seventh year; Yahweh disciplined the nation of Israel by using foreign nations to overthrow them.

The prophet Isaiah foretold of a foreign king, (King Cyrus) that would eventually arise, authorizing the return of the exiled Jews in Babylon to Jerusalem.

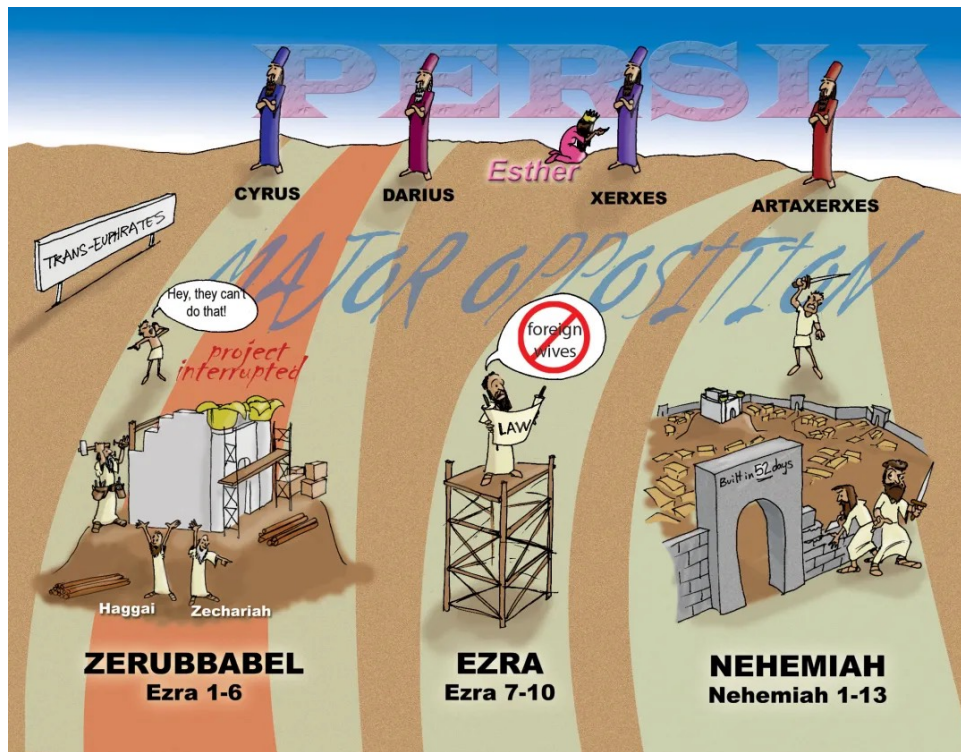
Isaiah 44:28

“ When I say of Cyrus, ‘He is My shepherd,’ he will certainly do as I say. He will command, ‘Rebuild Jerusalem’; he will say, ‘Restore the Temple.’”

Cyrus turned over all the plundered articles that were taken from the Jerusalem temple 70 years earlier, taken by the warriors of Babylon. In addition, the king provided finances for the construction of the temple.

Yahweh can cause even powerful human kings (without a relationship with Him) to be kind to those whom He chose to bless. May we never doubt that when Yahweh calls, He provides.

Three Parallel Movements



2. Zerubbabel's Leadership, the Return to Jerusalem, and Rebuilding the Temple

After King Cyrus uttered his decree to allow Jews in Babylon to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple, 49,897 people ([Ezra 2:64-65](#)), led by Zerubbabel ([Ezra 2:2](#)), made the journey back to Jerusalem. Working together with Zerubbabel was Jeshua (Joshua), a High Priest.

3. The Building Construction Halted

The Samaritans were a mixed race of Jews and Gentiles who were living in the northern part of Israel:

2 Kings 17:29 “ **But these various groups of foreigners also continued to worship their own gods. In town after town where they lived, they placed their idols at the pagan shrines that the people of Samaria had built.**”

It was these people who became hostile during the construction of the temple, as well as a hindrance to the construction of the walls around Jerusalem some years later under Nehemiah's leadership. [2 Kings 17:24-31](#)

[Nehemiah 2:10](#) “**But when Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite official heard of my arrival, they were very displeased that someone had come to help the people of Israel.**”

Zerubbabel and the High Priest, Jeshua, refused to allow the Samaritans to be involved in their construction work, nor did they permit them to worship alongside them, because this would have formed an ungodly alliance ([Ezra 4:1-3](#)).

Rejected and offended, the Samaritans began various methods of frustrating the construction work:

[\(Ezra 4:4-5\)](#) **4“Then the local residents tried to discourage and frighten the people of Judah to keep them from their work. 5 They bribed agents to work against them and to frustrate their plans. This went on during the entire reign of King Cyrus of Persia and lasted until King Darius of Persia took the throne”**

Though opposition arose, the favor of God rested on the people and the work on rebuilding the temple continued ([Ezra 5:3-17](#)), and it was finally completed 20 years after their arrival from Babylon (6:1-22).

Most of the returnees rejoiced to see the finished Temple. But some of the older folks wept when they compared the humble structure with the magnificence of the first Temple, Solomon's Temple. To them it was simply too inferior.



Haggai 2:3 (NLT) **“Does anyone remember this house—this Temple—in its former splendor? How, in comparison, does it look to you now? It must seem like nothing at all!”**

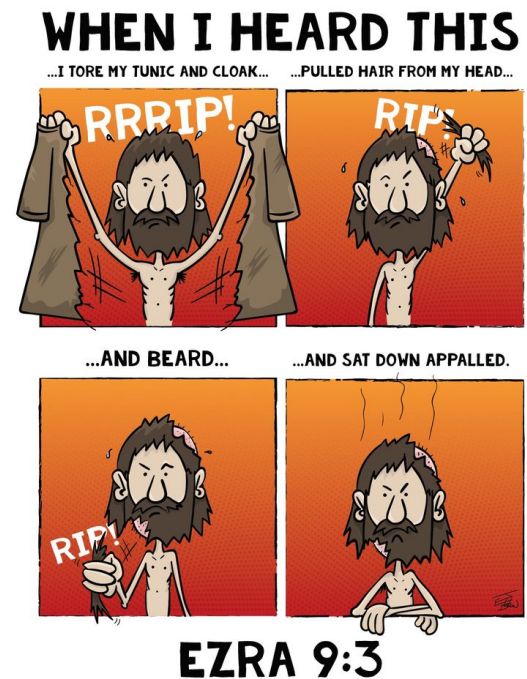
4. Ezra's Leadership and the Spiritual Climate of Jerusalem.

Between the time the first group, led by Zerubbabel, arrived in Jerusalem and when Ezra's group arrived, around 60 years had elapsed. There had been a time of great rejoicing immediately following the dedication of the temple in 515 B.C., but in just one generation things had changed dramatically. Tragically, in that short period of time, we find that sin had crept in, and spiritual reform was desperately needed again ([Ezra 9:1-2](#)).

Ezra was informed by some of the leaders that many of their fellow leaders, and the general population of Israelites, had both intermarried with the local peoples and mixed their pagan religions in, with their right worship of the Lord God. He was shocked and tore his clothes, hair, and beard and then sat silent the rest of the day.

At the time for the evening offering Ezra cried-out to the Lord God, his remembrance of all that He had done for Israel. He remembered the many offenses of Israel, and now this, even after the restoration of Israel to rebuild the temple, this latest offense of Israel against God was too much.

The high priest confessed the sins of the people, and proposed to Ezra that they separate from their foreign spouses and foreign false gods.



Nehemiah 9:37-38.

“So now today we are slaves in the land of plenty that you gave our ancestors for their enjoyment! We are slaves here in this good land. 37. The lush produce of this land piles up in the hands of the kings whom you have set over us because of our sins. They have power over us and our livestock. We serve them at their pleasure, and we are in great misery.”

The People Agree to Obey

38 The people responded, “In view of all this, we are making a solemn promise and putting it in writing. On this sealed document are the names of our leaders and Levites and priests.”

5. Nehemiah’s Leadership - Spiritual Reform and Building the Wall

Nehemiah served King Artaxerxes, loyally as cupbearer and learned about the Jew’s dire situation in Jerusalem. **Nehemiah prayed and fasted to God for four months before petitioning the King to return to his home and reinforce Jerusalem’s city walls.** Prayer and fasting should proceed God’s work. Page 5



Upon arrival into the city, Nehemiah assessed the damage and got to work. In spite of opposition, he led his people in rebuilding the wall and succeeded. There was a great celebration of the completion of the walls. Levites were recruited from the region to come and to lead the praises in two great choirs.

6. The Dedication of the Wall - Nehemiah 12:27, 40, 43

“27At the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem, the Levites were sought out from all their homes and brought to Jerusalem to celebrate the joyous dedication with thanksgiving and singing, accompanied by cymbals, harps, and lyres.

40The two thanksgiving choirs then stood in the house of God, as did I, along with the half of the officials accompanying me, **41**as well as the priests with their trumpets—

Nehemiah 12:43 On that day they offered great sacrifices, rejoicing because God had given them great joy. The women and children also rejoiced, so that the joy of Jerusalem was heard from afar...”

C. Glory to God and “Joy” for us

“When the Lord brought back the captives to Zion, we were like men who dreamed.” (Psalm 126:1-2a.) “Our mouths were filled with laughter, our tongues with songs of joy.”

We now have a better understanding of the Israelites “Joy”. When God does a great work in your life, it brings glory to God and joy for us.

There was a great celebration of the completion of the walls. Levites were recruited from the region to come and to lead the praises in two great choirs.

When the law of Moses was read the people discovered the prohibition of Ammonites from fellowship with Israel and immediately removed those of mixed ancestry from Jerusalem.

The Dedication of the Wall - Nehemiah 12

“27At the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem, the Levites were sought out from all their homes and brought to Jerusalem to celebrate the joyous dedication with thanksgiving and singing, accompanied by cymbals, harps, and lyres.

40The two thanksgiving choirs then stood in the house of God, as did I, along with the half of the officials accompanying me, 41as well as the priests with their trumpets—

Nehemiah 12:43 On that day they offered great sacrifices, rejoicing because God had given them great joy. The women and children also rejoiced, so that the joy of Jerusalem was heard from afar...”

C. Glory to God and “Joy” for us

And when God did the work of restoration in Zion, it brought glory to God and joy for the Jewish people. That’s what we see in **verses 2b-3: “Then it was said among the nations, ‘The Lord has done great things for them.’ 3 The Lord has done great things for us, and we are filled with joy.” (Psalm 126:2-3)**

“It was said among the nations.” What God did for Israel was so amazing that even the surrounding nations had to sit up and take notice of what God had done and give God the glory. And then notice that after the nations give glory to God, so also does Israel. **“The Lord has done great things for us, and we are filled with joy.”**

God’s salvation is meant to be seen by the nations. We read in [Isaiah 52:10](#): **“The Lord will lay bare his holy arm in the sight of all the nations, and all the ends of the earth will see the salvation of our God.”**

These verses remind us of our responsibility to tell others what God has done for us. Do your friends and neighbors know what God has done for you? Do you share testimonies of God's goodness with those around you on a regular basis?

II. Pray for and Expect Restoration in the Present-Psalm 126: 4 (NIV)

4 "Restore our fortunes, Lord, like streams in the Negev."

The psalmist here after facing the devastation on their return to Jerusalem, he is saying a prayer, a request, a petition to God to restore them! He is asking God for a spectacular restoration like the Negev region does when it gets rains.

The Negev region is the desert region in the south of Israel and is an area that is very dry and parched. However, in certain seasons when there is rainfall in the Negev, it comes abundantly and what was a dry riverbed is transformed into torrential streams and the whole area blossoms. This is the vivid picture of restoration that we expect to come. It speaks of a sudden outpouring of God's Holy Spirit and blessing!

Unfortunately, if you are thinking that perhaps this will be the turning point in the story for Israel, it is not. The book ends with a huge downer. (Nehemiah 13) Nehemiah returned to , he toured around the city and finds that the people have not fulfilled their covenant vows. Zerubbabel's work is undone as the temple is neglected and staffed by unqualified people. Ezra's work, too, is compromised, as Nehemiah discovers that people are violating the Torah and working on the Sabbath. Even his own work on the walls is spoiled, as people were setting up markets by the walls and gates to work on the Sabbath. Nehemiah goes on a rampage, beating people, pulling out their hair, and yelling that they have to obey the commands of the Torah. His last recorded words are a prayer asking that God remembers him with favor because at least he tried

Psalm 126: 4 (MSG)

"And now, God, do it again— bring rains to our drought-stricken lives."

In reading the Message translation, we are reminded that God can "do it again" and restore our present drought-stricken lives just like He did it in the past! We can put our trust and confidence in God because of the promises that God has given in His Word.

The Jewish people experienced the restoration of God. God helped the captives re-establish themselves in the land just as the prophet Jeremiah had prophesied, while they were in exile. However, they continued in their cycle of sin-repent-restored-sin again. However, the day will come when the blinders shall be removed from all Israelites. They shall meet their Messiah Jesus. He keeps His Promises!

Jeremiah 29:10-12 (NIV)

10 “This is what the Lord says: “When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my good promise to bring you back to this place. 11 For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. 12 Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you.”

III. Sow and Anticipate a Great Harvest in the Future

Psalms 126: 5-6 (NIV).

5 “Those who sow with tears will reap with songs of joy. 6 Those who go out weeping, carrying seed to sow, will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with them.”



Often God also works through a slower but very certain way in our lives - through the process of sowing and reaping. Jesus told us in John 16:33 that **“ In this world we will have trouble but to take heart as He has overcome the world!”** In the journey of our Christian life, we are traveling upward to Heavenly Jerusalem, the city of our God where there will be no more tears. We need to persevere through hard times, our trials, and don't give up because it will be so worth it when we see our Heavenly Father, face to face!

Jesus is our example and He is calling each of us to model after Him. Jesus sowed His life on the cross in anticipation of the joy of our redemption and harvest of our souls!

Hebrews 12:1-2 (NIV)

“ let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, 2 fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”

God has given us seeds to sow in this life, seeds of His purpose and destiny for our lives. We are to sow the seeds of the Gospel, seeds of hope, seeds of prayer, seeds of love, joy, peace, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Regardless of our present conditions, we need to always sow in anticipation of the great harvest and unending joy, Holy Spirit gives us.

Lesson References:

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Ezra 7 – 10, Nehemiah, Psalms 126 Return to Reconstruct Jerusalem, Reforms



created by the Bible Project

