

Psalm 126:1

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

When the LORD turned again the captivity of Zion, we were like them that dream.

Analysis

The psalm begins with joyful retrospection on restoration: 'When the LORD turned again the captivity of Zion, we were like them that dream.' The phrase 'turned again the captivity' (Hebrew 'shub shebut') means restore fortunes or bring back captives - specifically referring to return from Babylonian exile, though applicable to any divine restoration. The expression 'we were like them that dream' captures the overwhelming, almost unbelievable joy of deliverance. Dreams seem unreal, too good to be true; restoration felt surreal after decades of exile. The comparison to dreamers suggests disorientation, wonder, and questioning whether the experience is real. This verse models how to receive restoration - with amazed gratitude, recognizing that deliverance exceeds expectation and seems too good for reality. The joy stems from God's action ('LORD turned'), not human achievement.

Historical Context

The Babylonian exile lasted approximately 70 years (586-516 BC), devastating Israelite national, religious, and social life. Cyrus's decree allowing return (538 BC) seemed miraculous after such prolonged suffering. For those who returned, rebuilding Jerusalem and temple fulfilled prophetic promises that seemed impossible during exile. The dreamlike quality captures the psychological impact of moving from despair to hope realized.

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Study Questions

1. What does it mean to experience blessing so surprising it feels like a dream?
2. How does the phrase 'LORD turned' emphasize divine initiative in restoration?
3. Why might restoration feel surreal or dreamlike rather than simply joyful?
4. What modern experiences of God's deliverance produce this dreamlike wonder?
5. How does remembering past restoration sustain faith during present trials?

Interlinear Text

בָּשׁ וּבָשָׁר אַתָּה שִׁיבָּת שִׁיבָּת צִיּוֹן
turned again When the LORD the captivity of Zion
H7725 H3068 H853 H7870 H6726 H1961

כְּחַלְמִים:

we were like them that dream

H2492

Additional Cross-References

Hosea 6:11 (Parallel theme): Also, O Judah, he hath set an harvest for thee, when I returned the captivity of my people.

Joel 3:1 (Parallel theme): For, behold, in those days, and in that time, when I shall bring again the captivity of Judah and Jerusalem,

Psalms 85:1 (References Lord): LORD, thou hast been favourable unto thy land: thou hast brought back the captivity of Jacob.

Acts 12:9 (Parallel theme): And he went out, and followed him; and wist not that it was true which was done by the angel; but thought he saw a vision.

Psalms 120:1 (References Lord): In my distress I cried unto the LORD, and he heard me.

Psalms 123:1 (Parallel theme): Unto thee lift I up mine eyes, O thou that dwellest in the heavens.

Psalms 53:6 (Parallel theme): Oh that the salvation of Israel were come out of Zion! When God bringeth back the captivity of his people, Jacob shall rejoice, and Israel shall be glad.

Psalms 125:1 (References Lord): They that trust in the LORD shall be as mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abideth for ever.

Psalms 124:1 (References Lord): If it had not been the LORD who was on our side, now may Israel say;

Job 42:10 (References Lord): And the LORD turned the captivity of Job, when he prayed for his friends: also the LORD gave Job twice as much as he had before.