

Psalms 126:4

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Turn again our captivity, O LORD, as the streams in the south.

Analysis

The psalm shifts from celebration to petition: 'Turn again our captivity, O LORD, as the streams in the south.' The prayer 'turn again our captivity' seems puzzling after verses 1-3 celebrated restoration. This suggests either

1. the restoration is incomplete
2. new troubles have arisen, or
3. the psalm looks forward to ultimate, eschatological restoration.

The comparison 'as the streams in the south' (Hebrew 'negev' - the arid region south of Judah) references seasonal watercourses that run dry most of the year but flood suddenly during winter rains. The simile asks God to bring restoration as dramatically and refreshingly as sudden water flow transforms the desert. What seems permanently barren can become abundantly fruitful through divine intervention. The prayer demonstrates that even after experiencing God's great works (v. 3), His people still need ongoing deliverance.

Historical Context

The post-exilic period, while marking return from Babylon, involved continued hardship - poverty, opposition, Persian dominance, and incomplete restoration compared to Solomon's glory. The community needed ongoing divine intervention, not just one-time deliverance. The Negev's seasonal streams provided perfect imagery for a people familiar with that geographic region and its transformation during rainy season.

Related Passages

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Study Questions

1. Why would the psalmist pray for restoration after already celebrating restoration?
2. How do the 'streams in the south' illustrate the dramatic, transformative nature of divine deliverance?
3. What does this verse teach about the ongoing need for God's intervention even after experiencing blessing?
4. In what ways is restoration often partial or progressive rather than complete and immediate?
5. How does this prayer balance gratitude for past deliverance with petition for continued need?

Interlinear Text

שׁוּבָה	יְהוָה	אֶת	שְׁבוּתֵנוּ	כַּאֲפִיקַיִם	בְּנִגְבִּי
Turn again	O LORD	H853	our captivity	as the streams	in the south
H7725	H3068		H7622	H650	H5045

Additional Cross-References

Psalms 85:4 (Parallel theme): Turn us, O God of our salvation, and cause thine anger toward us to cease.

Isaiah 41:18 (Parallel theme): I will open rivers in high places, and fountains in the midst of the valleys: I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water.

Isaiah 43:19 (Parallel theme): Behold, I will do a new thing; now it shall spring forth; shall ye not know it? I will even make a way in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert.

Psalms 126:1 (References Lord): When the LORD turned again the captivity of Zion, we were like them that dream.

Joshua 3:16 (Parallel theme): That the waters which came down from above stood and rose up upon an heap very far from the city Adam, that is beside Zaretan: and those that came down toward the sea of the plain, even the salt sea, failed, and were cut off: and the people passed over right against Jericho.

Hosea 1:11 (Parallel theme): Then shall the children of Judah and the children of Israel be gathered together, and appoint themselves one head, and they shall come up out of the land: for great shall be the day of Jezreel.

Isaiah 35:6 (Parallel theme): Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing: for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert.