

We draw our four-week season on the psalms to a close as we read **Psalm 126**, in which we explore words that can help and support our prayer, with the opportunity to sing and shout for joy.

*This is the final of four Bible studies in which we draw upon the psalms to help us deepen our prayer.*

## Bible notes

From the time of King David (1000–922 BC), the capital city of the Israelites was Jerusalem, built on Mount Zion, with the Temple eventually built right on the top of the mountain. Zion, then, means Jerusalem, but it also symbolises salvation. However, in 597 BC the city was taken by the Babylonians and the temple was destroyed. All the leading figures among the Jews were marched into exile in Babylon about 1,000 miles away.

However, the Babylonians were defeated by the Persians under Cyrus and the exiles were allowed to go home in 538. A few years later they built a second temple in which all these psalms were performed. This Psalm, 126, was written at this time when 'the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion'. The psalm is a little ambiguous, however, as the psalmist may be dreaming of these events, which he believes (rightly) were about to happen.

The Negeb of verse 4 is an arid desert in the south of Israel. Still as dry as ever, it is occupied by Bedouin wanderers. When it does rain, the streams (or wadis) are suddenly filled with rushing water, which restores fertility

to the area for a time. This image of a transformation from aridity to fertility is here used as an analogy of the change in Israel's fortunes after captivity and exile. In the same way, the psalmist uses the image of farming to illustrate how tears and weeping change to shouts of joy. In every case, unhappiness is temporary, as God fulfils the deepest desires of the Israelites.

## Make connections

The Jewish experience of exile in Babylon can be found in a number of places in the Old Testament.

In a land as dry as Israel, water is a vivid symbol of health and prosperity. This symbol has been used, particularly by John 4.7-15 and 5.2-9, where it probably has a connection with baptism by immersion.

The psalm expresses the joy of knowing God has provided abundantly that prayers are answered. We, too, are called to celebrate the abundant joy of knowing God provides for our needs.

## Explore

In the past four weeks we have looked at four psalms that have taken us from praising God, pleading with God, being reassured, and finally having one's desires fulfilled.

- What images do you think best express fulfilment or well-being?
- How might it feel to be captive away from your home, or forced to live away from your homeland like an asylum seeker, or someone caught up in a war?
- What do you think it would feel like to find refuge in a new home?

The people of Israel wrote and sang today's psalm in response to the joy of seeing God restore their fortunes.

### Create your own works of praise.

- Think about a time when you were happy.

In the psalm, the happiness of the people was increased, by seeing God as the cause of their joy.

- How might you see God at work in your joyful moments?

The psalmist responded in verse and in song: create a modern equivalent. You might like to write a poem about it, or create a rap or write new words to a tune you know, so you could sing about it. If you find it easier to respond to God's action in a less personal way, base your poem or song on current events.