

Nomads and Pilgrims

The Songs of Ascent

Introduction

A funeral seems an unlikely place to find joy, especially when it is the funeral of a twenty year old woman who was killed in a car accident on her way home from a Bible study by a drunk driver. At the close of the service, a young man, cousin of the deceased, stood with his guitar and sang a popular contemporary song about heaven:

Surrounded by Your glory, what will my heart feel

Will I dance for You Jesus or in awe of You be still

Will I stand in Your presence or to my knees will I fall

Will I sing hallelujah, will I be able to speak at all

I can only imagine

As I looked over at the mother of the young woman, I was amazed at the expression of joy I saw on her face. With her eyes closed and face lifted to heaven, I knew that she was envisioning her precious daughter entering the presence of our loving Lord. Even in her sadness, there was joy.

Psalm 126 is a song of joy that also has much to teach us about the reasons for our joy. It teaches us that we can experience joy even in difficult circumstances. It looks back to God's deliverance and looks forward to a future where God continues to bless his people. ~ D.S.

Study Notes

Question 2

- This psalm coincides with the period of Israel's history after a period of exile. As the psalm opens, the Jewish people return to their homeland, against all odds. But they are faced with the monumental task of rebuilding. This period of Israel's history is recorded in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah.

Joy

Psalm 126

Observe & Interpret

1. Is there a song that brings back happy memories for you? Share briefly about those memories.
2. *Read Psalm 126.* In verses 1-3, how does the psalmist describe the feelings of the people? Why do you think they were so stunned by this experience?
3. The second half of the psalm looks to the future. What things does the psalmist expect the future to bring? Are they all good things? Would you describe the tone of this section as optimistic or pessimistic? Why?

Study Notes

Question 4

• From the *New Bible Commentary* (p. 531): “ It is not that [the Jewish people’s] efforts contribute to blessing, any more than the farmer can make the seed grow. But if he is not obedient to God’s natural laws—even when the task is wearisome unto tears—there will be no harvest. The obedience of His people is the context in which the Lord works miracles of transforming blessing.”

4. According to the psalmist, what role will God play in Israel’s future prosperity? What is the task of the people of God?

5. What is the relationship between joy and sorrow in this psalm? Look at each time the psalmist uses the word joy. In each case, what has brought their joy? What part does God play in each case?

Apply

6. The Negev (v. 4) was a network of shallow ditches that were dry for most of the year. Sudden rains would turn them into gushing streams and bring a burst of color as flowers sprang up. What does this image convey about what sometimes happens in our spiritual lives? Have you had a sudden experience of God’s blessing in the middle of a dry time in your life? What happened?

