

Job 24:8

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

They are wet with the showers of the mountains, and embrace the rock for want of a shelter.

Analysis

They are wet with the showers of the mountains (מִזֶּרֶם הָרִים יִרְטָבוּ, mizzérem harím yirtávu)—The zerem (זֶרֶם) is a rainstorm or downpour, and ratav (רָטַב) means to be drenched or soaked. Mountain rains in the ancient Near East were cold and dangerous—those without shelter risked hypothermia. Job continues his portrayal of the desperately poor, exposed to the elements without protection. This vulnerability to weather represents complete destitution—they can't even access basic shelter.

And embrace the rock for want of a shelter (וּמִבְּלִי מַחְסֶה חִבְּבֻּקֵי צוּר, umibbéli machséh chibbequtsúr)—The verb chabaq (חִבַּק) means to embrace or clasp, suggesting desperate clinging for any protection. The tsur (צוּר, rock) might provide minimal wind-break but no real shelter. Machseh (מַחְסֶה) means refuge or shelter—its absence forces the poor to cling to rocks. This word appears frequently in Psalms describing God as refuge (Psalm 91:2, 9), creating poignant contrast: the poor literally embrace rocks while the faithful embrace God as refuge. The image evokes Jesus's teaching about building on rock versus sand (Matthew 7:24-27), but here the tragedy is that the poor have only literal rocks, not the Rock of salvation.

Historical Context

Mountainous terrain in ancient Palestine provided some natural shelters—caves, rock overhangs—where shepherds and travelers might take refuge. That the poor must embrace bare rocks suggests they're denied even these basic refuges,

perhaps driven from caves by those with power. Alternatively, they live in areas so marginal that even minimal natural shelter is unavailable. The image reinforces systematic exclusion from all resources.

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Study Questions

1. How does this physical image of embracing rocks illuminate our spiritual need for God as our true refuge?
2. What does Job's empathetic description of the poor's suffering reveal about authentic covenant righteousness?
3. How can believers ensure that those without shelter have access to protection and safety?

Interlinear Text

מִזֶּרֶם	הַר יָם	יֹרֵט בּוֹ	וּמִבֵּלִי	נִחֶסֶה
with the showers	of the mountains	They are wet	H1097	for want of a shelter
H2230	H2022	H7372		H4268
חֲבֹקוּ	צוֹר:			
and embrace	the rock			
H2263	H6697			

Additional Cross-References

Lamentations 4:5 (Parallel theme): They that did feed delicately are desolate in the streets: they that were brought up in scarlet embrace dunghills.

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