

Lamentations 3:53

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

They have cut off my life in the dungeon, and cast a stone upon me.

Analysis

The imagery darkens: **"They have cut off my life in the dungeon, and cast a stone upon me."** The Hebrew *tsamequ vabbor chayayi vayyaddu-even bi* describes being trapped and sealed in a pit. *Tsamequ* (צָמַק) means to destroy, exterminate, or cut off. *Vabbor* (בֹּר, "in the pit/cistern") refers to an underground chamber, often used for imprisonment or execution.

"Cast a stone upon me" (*vayyaddu-even bi*, וַיִּדְּבֹק בִּי) suggests sealing the pit's opening with a stone, leaving the victim to die of exposure, thirst, or suffocation. This echoes Jeremiah's literal experience—thrown into a cistern that was muddy and intended as his tomb (Jeremiah 38:6). The stone sealing suggests finality—no escape possible.

Theologically, the pit often symbolizes death, Sheol, or overwhelming crisis (Psalm 40:2, 88:3-6). Yet the very fact this verse exists—that the speaker survived to testify—previews deliverance. Just as Jeremiah was pulled from the cistern (Jeremiah 38:10-13), God delivers those who cry to Him from the depths. This anticipates verses 55-57 where the speaker calls from the pit and God answers. Ultimate the imagery points to Christ, whose tomb was sealed with a stone (Matthew 27:60), yet who rose victorious over death.

Historical Context

Jeremiah 38:6 provides the historical referent: "Then took they Jeremiah, and cast him into the dungeon of Malchiah the son of Hammelech, that was in the court of the prison: and they let down Jeremiah with cords. And in the dungeon there was no water, but mire: so Jeremiah sunk in the mire." The intention was assassination without direct execution—letting Jeremiah die slowly in the pit.

Ancient cisterns were underground chambers carved into rock, used for water storage. When empty or muddy, they served as prisons (Genesis 37:24, Zechariah 9:11). The muddy conditions and lack of food/water made them death traps. Ebed-melech the Ethiopian rescued Jeremiah using ropes and rags (Jeremiah 38:10-13), demonstrating God's providential preservation.

The practice of sealing tombs with stones was common. Jesus's tomb was sealed with "a great stone" (Matthew 27:60). Daniel's lions' den was sealed with a stone (Daniel 6:17). The stone symbolized finality—no escape, no hope. Yet in each case, God miraculously delivered: Jeremiah pulled from the cistern, Daniel protected in the den, Jesus resurrected from the tomb. The stone intended to seal death became testimony to divine power.

Related Passages

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Study Questions

1. How does being thrown into a pit and sealed with a stone illustrate the experience of apparently hopeless circumstances?

2. What does Jeremiah's literal rescue from the cistern teach about God's ability to deliver from impossible situations?
3. In what ways does Christ's tomb being sealed with a stone connect to this verse, and how does His resurrection provide ultimate hope?
4. How should believers maintain faith when circumstances seem as final and hopeless as a sealed pit?

Interlinear Text

וַיִּצְמְטוּ	בְּבוֹר	חַיִּי	וַיִּזְלֹ	אֶת־בֶּן־אֶבֶן	אֶבֶן
They have cut off	in the dungeon	my life	and cast	a stone	
H6789	H953	H2416	H3034	H68	

Additional Cross-References

Jeremiah 38:9 (Parallel theme): My lord the king, these men have done evil in all that they have done to Jeremiah the prophet, whom they have cast into the dungeon; and he is like to die for hunger in the place where he is: for there is no more bread in the city.

Jeremiah 38:6 (Parallel theme): Then took they Jeremiah, and cast him into the dungeon of Malchiah the son of Hammelech, that was in the court of the prison: and they let down Jeremiah with cords. And in the dungeon there was no water, but mire: so Jeremiah sunk in the mire.

Daniel 6:17 (Parallel theme): And a stone was brought, and laid upon the mouth of the den; and the king sealed it with his own signet, and with the signet of his lords; that the purpose might not be changed concerning Daniel.

Jeremiah 37:16 (Parallel theme): When Jeremiah was entered into the dungeon, and into the cabins, and Jeremiah had remained there many days;