

Lamentations 3:54

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Waters flowed over mine head; then I said, I am cut off.

Analysis

Drowning in despair: "**Waters flowed over mine head; then I said, I am cut off.**" The Hebrew tsafu-mayim al-roshi amarti nigzarti (אֲפֻׂרְמִים עַל־רָאֵשׁ אָמַרְתִּי נִגְזַׂרְתִּי) continues the pit imagery. Tsafu (צָפוּ) means to overflow, flood, or cover. Waters rising above the head (al-roshi, עַל־רָאֵשׁ) indicate drowning—the ultimate drowning sensation of being completely submerged with no air.

"I said, I am cut off" (amarti nigzarti, אָמַרְתִּי נִגְזַׂרְתִּי) expresses conviction of imminent death. Nigzarti (נִגְזַׂרְתִּי) means "I am cut off, severed, destroyed." This is the speaker's assessment of the situation—all hope lost, death certain. Yet the very fact he speaks of this past moment means he survived, previewing God's deliverance in verses 55-58.

Theologically, water imagery often represents overwhelming circumstances, death, or divine judgment (Psalm 42:7, 69:1-2, 15, Jonah 2:3-6). The sensation of drowning—waters over one's head—captures the experience of being overwhelmed beyond capacity to endure. Yet Scripture repeatedly testifies that when saints cry to God from these depths, He hears and delivers. Isaiah 43:2 promises: "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee."

Historical Context

The literal dungeon/cistern where Jeremiah was thrown contained mire (mud) rather than water (Jeremiah 38:6), but the overwhelming sensation parallels drowning. Ancient cisterns could indeed fill with water during rains, creating

actual drowning risk for prisoners. The imagery captures both physical and spiritual realities—the sense of being overwhelmed, unable to breathe, with death imminent.

The exile experience as a whole felt like drowning. Psalm 69:1-2, 14-15 uses identical imagery: "Save me, O God; for the waters are come in unto my soul. I sink in deep mire, where there is no standing...Let me be delivered from them that hate me, and out of the deep waters. Let not the waterflood overflow me, neither let the deep swallow me up." For exiles, foreign culture and pagan religion threatened to overwhelm and destroy covenant identity.

Jonah's experience provides a complementary picture. Jonah 2:3-6 describes waters overwhelming him, weeds wrapped around his head, descent to the depths—yet "thou hast brought up my life from corruption, O LORD my God." Like Jonah, exilic Israel descended into judgment's depths, believed themselves cut off, yet God preserved a remnant and brought restoration. The drowning sensation preceded deliverance.

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Study Questions

1. How does the imagery of waters flowing over one's head capture the experience of being overwhelmed beyond capacity to cope?
2. What does the speaker's survival (being able to recount this past moment of saying 'I am cut off') teach about God's deliverance?
3. In what ways did Christ experience the ultimate 'waters flowing over His head' in bearing God's wrath, and how does this secure our deliverance?

4. How should believers respond when circumstances feel like drowning—when we're tempted to say 'I am cut off' from hope?

Interlinear Text

צָפֹן מִן עַל רָאשׁ אֶם רָתִי נִגְזַרְתִּי אֶם כִּי
flowed over Waters mine head then I said I am cut off
H6687 H4325 H5921 H7218 H559 H1504

Additional Cross-References

Ezekiel 37:11 (Parallel theme): Then he said unto me, Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel: behold, they say, Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost: we are cut off for our parts.

Psalms 18:4 (Parallel theme): The sorrows of death compassed me, and the floods of ungodly men made me afraid.

Lamentations 3:18 (Parallel theme): And I said, My strength and my hope is perished from the LORD:

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