

Lamentations 4:20

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

The breath of our nostrils, the anointed of the LORD, was taken in their pits, of whom we said, Under his shadow we shall live among the heathen.

Analysis

The king's capture lamented: "**The breath of our nostrils, the anointed of the LORD, was taken in their pits, of whom we said, Under his shadow we shall live among the heathen.**" The Hebrew ruach appeinu meshiyach YHWH nilkad bishchototam asher amarnu betsillov nich'eneh vagoyim uses exalted language for the Davidic king. Ruach appeinu (רוּחַ אֲפִינָו) indicates the king was considered essential to life itself—like breath.

"The anointed of the LORD" (meshiyach YHWH, מֶשִׁיחַ יְהוָה) is the Hebrew term for Messiah—the divinely appointed king from David's line. "Was taken in their pits" (nilkad bishchototam, נִלְכָּד בְּשְׁחׁוֹתָתָם) describes capture. Shachath (שְׁחַת) means pit, trap, or destruction. The phrase "under his shadow we shall live" (betsillov nich'eh, בְּצַלְוָן נִחְיָה) expresses the hope that the king's protection would preserve a remnant even in exile.

Theologically, this verse highlights the tragedy of failed human kingship pointing toward need for the true Messiah. David's line produced flawed kings whose failures culminated in Zedekiah's capture. Yet God's promise of an eternal Davidic kingdom (2 Samuel 7:12-16) awaited fulfillment in Christ—the true Anointed One whose reign never fails and under whose shadow believers truly live forever (Psalm 91:1).

Historical Context

This refers specifically to King Zedekiah's capture. 2 Kings 25:4-7 describes the event: "the king went the way toward the plain. And the army of the Chaldees pursued after the king, and overtook him...Then they took the king...and brought him up unto the king of Babylon...And they slew the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes, and put out the eyes of Zedekiah, and bound him with fetters of brass, and carried him to Babylon."

The language "breath of our nostrils" and "anointed of the LORD" reflects the elevated view of Davidic kingship. Psalm 2:2 speaks of "the LORD's anointed." The king represented God's rule and embodied national hopes. That he was "taken in their pits" (captured by enemies) represented not just political defeat but theological crisis—how could God's anointed fall?

The hope to "live under his shadow among the nations" reflected expectation that even in exile, having a Davidic king would preserve identity and hope for restoration. But Zedekiah's capture, his sons' execution, and his imprisonment in Babylon (where he died—Jeremiah 52:11) ended visible Davidic rule. This apparent failure of God's promise to David created crisis resolved only by recognizing that ultimate fulfillment comes through Christ, David's greater Son, whose kingdom is eternal and indestructible (Luke 1:32-33, Revelation 11:15).

Related Passages

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Psalm 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Study Questions

1. What does calling the king 'the breath of our nostrils' reveal about how central the Davidic monarchy was to Israel's identity and hope?
2. How does the failure of earthly Davidic kings ('taken in their pits') point to need for a perfect, eternal King—the Messiah?

3. In what ways does living 'under His shadow' find ultimate fulfillment in Christ's protection and reign over believers?
4. How should Zedekiah's capture and the apparent end of Davidic kingship have prepared Israel for a greater understanding of Messianic hope?

Interlinear Text

ר וּם	אֶפְנָנוּ	מֶשֶׁרֶת	יְהִי הָ	נָלַכְתָּ	בְּשִׁחְיָתֹתָם
The breath	of our nostrils	the anointed	of the LORD	was taken	in their pits
H7307	H639	H4899	H3068	H3920	H7825
אֲשֶׁר	אֶמְתָּנוּ	בְּצָלָה	נָחַי הָ		בְּגָגִים:
H834	of whom we said	Under his shadow	we shall live	among the heathen	
	H559	H6738	H2421		H1471

Additional Cross-References

Jeremiah 39:5 (Parallel theme): But the Chaldeans' army pursued after them, and overtook Zedekiah in the plains of Jericho: and when they had taken him, they brought him up to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon to Riblah in the land of Hamath, where he gave judgment upon him.

Genesis 2:7 (References Lord): And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.

Ezekiel 12:13 (Parallel theme): My net also will I spread upon him, and he shall be taken in my snare: and I will bring him to Babylon to the land of the Chaldeans; yet shall he not see it, though he shall die there.

2 Samuel 19:21 (References Lord): But Abishai the son of Zeruiah answered and said, Shall not Shimei be put to death for this, because he cursed the LORD'S anointed?

Lamentations 2:9 (References Lord): Her gates are sunk into the ground; he hath destroyed and broken her bars: her king and her princes are among the Gentiles: the law is no more; her prophets also find no vision from the LORD.

2 Samuel 1:21 (Parallel theme): Ye mountains of Gilboa, let there be no dew, neither let there be rain, upon you, nor fields of offerings: for there the shield of the mighty is vilely cast away, the shield of Saul, as though he had not been anointed with oil.

2 Samuel 1:14 (References Lord): And David said unto him, How wast thou not afraid to stretch forth thine hand to destroy the LORD'S anointed?

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