

Psalms 116:3

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

The sorrows of death compassed me, and the pains of hell gat hold upon me: I found trouble and sorrow.

Analysis

The sorrows of death compassed me, and the pains of hell gat hold upon me: I found trouble and sorrow. This verse describes the crisis that prompted the psalmist's cry. **The sorrows of death** (chebley-mavet, חֶבְלֵי-מָוֵת) literally means 'cords of death'—the ropes that bind and drag toward death. The imagery is of being trapped, captured, pulled inexorably toward destruction.

The pains of hell (metzarei sheol, מְצָרֵי שָׁאֹל) uses Sheol (שָׁאֹל), the Hebrew term for the realm of the dead. Metzarei means straits, distresses, anguish. The psalmist felt Sheol's grip—death's power closing in. Whether literal mortal illness or metaphorical description of extreme peril, the language is desperate.

I found trouble and sorrow (tzarah veyagon emtza, תָּצָרָה וְיָגוֹן אָמַתָּצָא). The verb matza (אָמַת, to find) suggests these weren't sought but encountered—trouble found him. This is the human condition after the Fall: death's shadow, sorrow's intrusion, trouble's unwelcome arrival. Only divine intervention breaks death's cords and hell's grip.

Historical Context

The language of death's cords and Sheol's pains appears throughout biblical lament (2 Samuel 22:5-6, Psalm 18:4-5). Ancient Israel understood death not merely as biological cessation but as hostile power opposed to life-giving God. Sheol represented separation from God's active presence and blessing. Old

Testament saints possessed limited revelation about afterlife; their hope was primarily for long earthly life and descendants. The New Testament reveals that Christ descended into death's realm, broke its power, and holds the keys of death and Sheol/Hades (Revelation 1:18).

Related Passages

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Study Questions

1. How does identifying your struggles as 'cords of death' and 'pains of hell' put them in proper theological perspective?
2. In what ways has Christ's victory over death and hell transformed how believers face mortal threats and ultimate death?
3. What is the relationship between honestly naming distress ('I found trouble and sorrow') and maintaining faith in God's deliverance?

Interlinear Text

צַבְלִי	אָפֶפֶן	שָׁאָל	אַחֲמָצָא:	צַבְלִי	אָפֶפֶן	שָׁאָל	אַחֲמָצָא:
compassed	The sorrows	of death	me and the pains	of hell	gat hold	trouble	
H661	H2256	H4194	H4712	H7585	H4672	H6869	

וְיַגְעַל	אַחֲמָצָא:
and sorrow	gat hold
H3015	H4672

Additional Cross-References

Psalms 38:6 (Parallel theme): I am troubled; I am bowed down greatly; I go mourning all the day long.

