

Psalm 40:2

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings.

Analysis

He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings. This verse employs vivid metaphorical language to describe divine deliverance. The 'horrible pit' (bor shaon, בָּור שָׁאוֹן) literally means 'pit of tumult' or 'roaring pit'—a place of chaos, danger, and destruction. Combined with 'miry clay' (tit hayaven, תִּתְהַヤֵּן), which evokes quicksand or deep mud where one sinks hopelessly, the imagery suggests desperate, life-threatening circumstances from which escape is humanly impossible.

Jeremiah's experience literalizes this metaphor—enemies lowered him into a muddy cistern where he sank in mire (Jeremiah 38:6). But the imagery also carries theological significance: the pit represents death, Sheol, judgment, or the consequences of sin. Jonah prayed from the fish's belly, 'Out of the belly of hell cried I' (Jonah 2:2). Paul wrote that we were 'dead in trespasses and sins' (Ephesians 2:1)—sunk in the miry clay of sin's consequences.

'He brought me up' (vaya'aleni, וַיָּאֶלְןִי) uses the verb for ascending, lifting, raising—the opposite of sinking. God doesn't merely improve our circumstances within the pit; He lifts us completely out. This deliverance is entirely God's work—the one stuck in mire cannot extract himself. Similarly, salvation is God's work from start to finish: 'By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God' (Ephesians 2:8).

'Set my feet upon a rock' (vayaqem al sela raglai, עֲמַת עַל-סֶלָע בְּגַלְיָה) contrasts unstable mire with solid rock. The rock represents security, stability, unchanging foundation. Jesus concluded the Sermon on the Mount with this imagery: building on rock versus sand (Matthew 7:24-27). Paul identified the rock as Christ: 'For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ' (1 Corinthians 3:11). 'Established my goings' (konen ashurai, כָּנֵן אֲשֻׁרֵי) means He made my steps firm, directed my path, stabilized my walk. God doesn't just deliver us from danger but establishes us in security and directs us in righteousness.

Historical Context

The pit and miry clay imagery resonates with ancient Near Eastern geography and experience. Cisterns for water storage were common in Palestine's limestone terrain, and falling into empty or muddy cisterns posed serious danger. David, familiar with Judean wilderness, would have known such cisterns. The imagery also evokes the mythological 'pit' (Sheol) representing death and the grave, making this both physical and spiritual deliverance.

Israel's history includes literal pit deliverances: Joseph thrown into a pit by his brothers (Genesis 37:24), Jeremiah lowered into a muddy cistern (Jeremiah 38:6), and the three Hebrew youths threatened with the fiery furnace (Daniel 3). Each narrative demonstrates God's power to deliver those who trust Him, even from humanly impossible situations. These stories became paradigms for understanding God's salvation—He rescues from the pit of death and establishes on the rock of His faithfulness.

The exodus represents Israel's foundational pit-to-rock deliverance. Enslaved in Egypt (pit of bondage), stuck in seemingly inescapable circumstances (miry clay), they cried to God who heard and delivered them through the Red Sea, eventually bringing them to Sinai (rock) where He established them as His covenant people. The exodus pattern—bondage, deliverance, covenant establishment—became the template for understanding all of God's saving work.

Early Christians applied this psalm to Christ's death and resurrection. Jesus descended into death (the pit), but God 'brought him up' in resurrection,

establishing Him at the Father's right hand (the rock). Peter's Pentecost sermon quoted David's psalms to explain resurrection: 'Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell [Hades/the pit]' (Acts 2:27, quoting Psalm 16:10). Believers share Christ's pattern—raised from spiritual death, established on the Rock (Christ), and given firm footing for godly living.

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Study Questions

1. What 'horrible pit' has God delivered you from, and how do you testify to that deliverance?
2. In what ways is being stuck in 'miry clay' an accurate picture of life without Christ?
3. How does understanding that deliverance is entirely God's work ('He brought me up') affect your gratitude?
4. What does it mean practically to have your feet set 'upon a rock' in daily life?
5. How has God 'established your goings'—directed and stabilized your path since delivering you?

Interlinear Text

תִּבְרַא He brought me up	מִבְּרֵר pit	שָׁאוֹל also out of an horrible	מִטְּמֵן clay	מִטְּמֵן out of the miry
H5927	H953	H7588	H2916	H3121
עַל and set	עַל upon a rock	עַל my feet	עַל and established	עַל my goings
H6965	H5553	H7272	H3559	H838

Additional Cross-References

Psalms 37:23 (Parallel theme): The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD: and he delighteth in his way.

Psalms 27:5 (Parallel theme): For in the time of trouble he shall hide me in his pavilion: in the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me; he shall set me up upon a rock.

Psalms 119:133 (Parallel theme): Order my steps in thy word: and let not any iniquity have dominion over me.

Psalms 69:2 (Parallel theme): I sink in deep mire, where there is no standing: I am come into deep waters, where the floods overflow me.

Psalms 61:2 (Parallel theme): From the end of the earth will I cry unto thee, when my heart is overwhelmed: lead me to the rock that is higher than I.

Psalms 71:20 (Parallel theme): Thou, which hast shewed me great and sore troubles, shalt quicken me again, and shalt bring me up again from the depths of the earth.

Psalms 86:13 (Parallel theme): For great is thy mercy toward me: and thou hast delivered my soul from the lowest hell.

Zechariah 9:11 (Parallel theme): As for thee also, by the blood of thy covenant I have sent forth thy prisoners out of the pit wherein is no water.

Psalms 18:36 (Parallel theme): Thou hast enlarged my steps under me, that my feet did not slip.

Psalms 17:5 (Parallel theme): Hold up my goings in thy paths, that my footsteps slip not.