

Psalm 88:5

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Free among the dead, like the slain that lie in the grave,
whom thou rememberest no more: and they are cut off from
thy hand.

Analysis

Free among the dead (חַפְשֵׁי בָּمְתִים, chofshi bametim)—A haunting phrase: "free" typically denotes liberation, yet here it means cut loose, abandoned, cast off like a slave released without provision. The dead are "free" only in that they are forgotten, no longer under God's providential care. **Like the slain that lie in the grave, whom thou rememberest no more**—The verb "remember" (זָכַר, zakar) in Hebrew means active, covenant faithfulness, not mere recollection. To be forgotten by God means to be outside His saving attention.

And they are cut off from thy hand (נִגְזְרוּ מִזְבֵּחַ, nigzeru miyadekha)—The hand of God throughout Scripture signifies power, provision, and protection. To be "cut off" is to experience the ultimate abandonment. Yet remarkably, the New Testament reveals that in Christ's death, He experienced this very cutting off—forsaken by the Father—so that believers would never truly be cut off from God's hand (John 10:28-29).

Historical Context

This verse reflects the limited Old Testament understanding of afterlife. While later revelation (Daniel 12:2) and Christ's teaching would unveil resurrection hope, the psalmist speaks from the perspective that death ends meaningful relationship with God—making the stakes of earthly suffering even more acute for ancient believers who lacked full clarity on eternal life.

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Study Questions

1. How does the feeling of being "forgotten by God" differ from the theological reality of His constant presence?
2. What does Christ's experience of being "cut off" from the Father reveal about God's commitment to never ultimately forsake His children?
3. How should we respond to those who feel they are "free among the dead"—abandoned and purposeless?

Interlinear Text

אֲשֶׁר קָרְבָּנִים כַּמָּן כַּלְלִים שְׁכַבָּנִים בְּמִתְּבָנִים
among the dead Free like the slain that lie in the grave

H4191 H2670 H3644 H2491 H7901 H6913 H834

לְאֵלֹהִים יְהִי כְּמָה עִזָּה מִזְבֵּחַ
whom thou rememberest H2142 H5750 H1992 from thy hand H3027

כִּי־
no more and they are cut off
H1504

Additional Cross-References

Isaiah 53:8 (Parallel theme): He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare his generation? for he was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of my people was he stricken.

Psalms 31:22 (Parallel theme): For I said in my haste, I am cut off from before thine eyes: nevertheless thou heardest the voice of my supplications when I cried unto thee.

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