

Psalms 88:6

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Thou hast laid me in the lowest pit, in darkness, in the deeps.

Analysis

Thou hast laid me in the lowest pit, in darkness, in the deeps. This verse makes the shocking accusation that God Himself is responsible for the psalmist's suffering. Unlike Job's comforters who insisted suffering must be punishment for sin, or prosperity gospel teachers who claim suffering indicates lack of faith, this psalm directly attributes the affliction to divine action. This represents some of Scripture's most honest and challenging theology of suffering.

"Thou hast laid me" (שָׁתַּנִּי/shattani) uses the second person—"You" (God) have placed me. Shat means to put, place, set, appoint. This isn't Satan's attack, natural consequences, or random chance. The psalmist holds God responsible. This echoes Job 16:12: "I was at ease, but he hath broken me asunder: he hath also taken me by my neck, and shaken me to pieces." And Lamentations 3:2: "He hath led me, and brought me into darkness, but not into light."

"In the lowest pit" (בְּבוֹר תַּחְתִּיּוֹת/bevor tachtiyot) compounds descriptors of depth and despair. Bor (pit, cistern, dungeon) represents confinement, darkness, and danger—often a metaphor for Sheol or death. Tachtiyot (lowest parts, depths) intensifies: not just the pit but the very bottom. The psalmist feels utterly cast down, in the deepest possible place of abandonment.

"In darkness" (בְּמַחְשָׁכִים/bemachshakim) emphasizes the absence of light, hope, and understanding. Darkness in Scripture represents judgment (Exodus 10:21-22), evil (Ephesians 6:12), ignorance (John 3:19), and separation from God (1 John 1:5: "God is light, and in him is no darkness at all"). To be in darkness is to be where God's face seems hidden.

"In the deeps" (תִּלְצֹלוֹת/bimetzolot) adds the imagery of deep waters, overwhelming floods. Metzolot (depths, deep places) recalls the chaotic waters of creation that God ordered, and flood waters that threaten to destroy. Jonah prayed from the depths: "All thy billows and thy waves passed over me" (Jonah 2:3). The psalm's cumulative imagery—lowest pit, darkness, deeps—presents suffering so complete that escape seems impossible.

Theologically, this verse raises profound questions: Can we accuse God of causing suffering? How do we reconcile God's goodness with His sovereignty over affliction? The psalm doesn't resolve these tensions but models faith that brings honest accusations to God rather than abandoning Him. Even saying "You did this to me" maintains relationship with God, assuming He hears, cares, and can help.

Historical Context

Israel's theology of suffering was complex. Deuteronomic covenant theology connected obedience with blessing, disobedience with curse (Deuteronomy 28). Yet wisdom literature (Job, Ecclesiastes) and prophetic writings acknowledged that suffering often doesn't correlate with sin. The righteous suffer (Psalm 73), the wicked prosper (Jeremiah 12:1), and God's purposes in affliction remain mysterious.

Ancient Near Eastern 'pit' imagery had multiple layers. Cisterns for water storage, when empty, served as prisons (Jeremiah was cast into a cistern, Jeremiah 38:6). Mine shafts descended into earth's darkness. Burial caves were accessed through pit-like openings. All these contributed to 'pit' as metaphor for near-death experience, confinement, and separation from life and light.

The darkness imagery recalls Egypt's plague of darkness (Exodus 10:21-23) so thick 'it may be felt'—three days when Egyptians 'saw not one another, neither rose any from his place.' But that darkness was judgment on enemies; here the psalmist, one of God's people, experiences similar darkness. This creates theological crisis: Has God turned against His own?

Jesus's experience on the cross provides ultimate context for this verse. When 'there was darkness over all the land' from noon to 3 PM (Matthew 27:45), and Jesus cried 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?' (Matthew 27:46), He entered the lowest pit, darkness, and deeps on our behalf. Isaiah 53:10 prophesied: 'Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put him to grief.' God laid Jesus in the pit so that we might be raised from it.

Church history reveals that the deepest saints often experience the darkest nights. John of the Cross, Teresa of Avila, Brother Lawrence, George Müller—all testified to seasons of profound spiritual darkness where God seemed to have withdrawn, prayers felt unheard, and faith was tested severely. Yet these dark nights produced deeper trust, greater holiness, and more authentic compassion for others' suffering.

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Study Questions

1. How should we understand verses where Scripture attributes suffering to God's action, and how does this relate to God's good character?
2. What is the difference between honestly expressing to God that we feel He has afflicted us versus turning away from Him in bitterness or unbelief?
3. How does Jesus's experience of God-forsakenness on the cross transform our understanding of God's presence in our 'lowest pit' experiences?

Interlinear Text

שָׁ תָנִי	בֵּבּ וֹר	תַּחְתִּי וֹת	בְּ מַחְשֶׁכַּ יָם	בְּמַצְלוֹת:
Thou hast laid	pit	me in the lowest	in darkness	in the deeps
H7896	H953	H8482	H4285	H4688

Additional Cross-References

Psalms 69:15 (Parallel theme): Let not the waterflood overflow me, neither let the deep swallow me up, and let not the pit shut her mouth upon me.

Psalms 143:3 (Darkness): For the enemy hath persecuted my soul; he hath smitten my life down to the ground; he hath made me to dwell in darkness, as those that have been long dead.

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

Psalms 40:2 (Parallel theme): 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.

John 12:46 (Darkness): I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness.

Lamentations 3:2 (Darkness): He hath led me, and brought me into darkness, but not into light.