

Isaiah 28:20

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

For the bed is shorter than that a man can stretch himself on it: and the covering narrower than that he can wrap himself in it.

Analysis

For the bed is shorter than that a man can stretch himself on it: and the covering narrower than that he can wrap himself in it. This proverbial saying illustrates the total inadequacy of false refuges (v.15). The imagery is vivid: trying to sleep on a bed too short to lie down fully, with a blanket too narrow to cover your body. You're uncomfortable, exposed, frustrated—the very things meant to provide rest and protection fail their purpose. No matter how you arrange yourself, you can't get comfortable or covered. This is life trusting false securities: constant adjusting, never satisfied, ultimately exposed.

Applied to Jerusalem's political alliances: Egypt as 'bed' and 'covering' proves too small to provide security. Their covenant with death (v.15) offers no rest or protection. Only God provides adequate refuge. Psalm 91:1-4 describes dwelling in God's shelter, covered by His feathers—sufficient rest and protection. Jesus offers true rest (Matthew 11:28). Anything less than God is a short bed and narrow blanket—perpetually inadequate.

Historical Context

Egypt repeatedly proved an inadequate ally. When Babylon besieged Jerusalem, Egyptian help was 'shorter' and 'narrower' than Judah's need. Pharaoh's army briefly relieved pressure (Jeremiah 37:5) but withdrew, leaving Jerusalem exposed. Modern equivalents abound: wealth seems like security until economic collapse;

power seems protective until revolution comes; religion without Christ seems sufficient until death approaches. Only Christ provides adequate covering (Romans 13:14, Galatians 3:27) and rest (Hebrews 4:9-11).

Related Passages

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Study Questions

1. What 'short beds' and 'narrow coverings' (inadequate securities) are you trying to find rest and protection in?
2. How have you experienced the frustration of false refuges that can't fully cover or satisfy your needs?
3. How is Christ a 'sufficient bed' and 'adequate covering'—fully providing what we need for rest and protection?

Interlinear Text

קִ H3588	קָצָר H7114	הַמֵּצָע H4702	מִהַשְׁתַּרְעַ H8311
is shorter	For the bed	than that a man can stretch	
יְהַמְצֵק H4541	אֶת־הַמִּצְעָה H6887	צָרָה H3664	כִּהְתַּכְּנֵס׃
himself on it and the covering	narrower	than that he can wrap	

Additional Cross-References

Isaiah 64:6 (Parallel theme): But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away.

