

Isaiah 51:14

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

The captive exile hasteneth that he may be loosed, and that he should not die in the pit, nor that his bread should fail.

Analysis

The captive exile hasteneth that he may be loosed, and that he should not die in the pit, nor that his bread should fail. This verse promises swift deliverance for the "captive exile" (tso'eh, צֹעֵה), one bowed down or stooped under bondage. The verb "hasteneth" (mihar, מִהֵרָ) indicates urgency and speed—liberation comes quickly when God's time arrives. The threefold purpose describes deliverance's comprehensive scope: "be loosed" (freed from chains), "not die in the pit" (escape execution/starvation in prison), and bread not fail (provision secured).

The "pit" (shachat, שַׁחַת) can mean dungeon, grave, or place of corruption—a place of hopeless death. The promise addresses both physical survival (literal imprisonment/starvation) and spiritual death (separation from God). The mention of bread connects to daily sustenance, God's covenant provision symbolized in manna (Exodus 16) and anticipated in Christ, the "bread of life" (John 6:35).

From a Reformed perspective, this verse illustrates effectual calling and preservation of saints. Those whom God purposes to deliver will not perish in their bondage. Christ Himself proclaimed, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me...to preach deliverance to the captives...to set at liberty them that are bruised" (Luke 4:18). Believers, though captive to sin before conversion, are loosed by divine power, rescued from death's pit, and sustained by God's provision. The hastening reflects divine urgency in salvation—when God calls, the response comes swiftly and certainly.

Historical Context

This likely references conditions in Babylonian captivity where some Jews were imprisoned (Jeremiah in cisterns, Daniel's friends in furnaces, Daniel in lion's den). Prison conditions in the ancient world were brutal—Jeremiah 38:6 describes a muddy cistern where the prophet sank. Starvation was common, as prisons didn't provide food (prisoners depended on outside provision).

Cyrus's decree in 538 BCE brought sudden, unexpected liberation after 70 years of exile. The speed of reversal—Babylon falling in one night (Daniel 5)—fulfills the "hastening" promised here. Historically, this pattern repeats: Joseph hastily released from Egyptian prison to become vizier, Peter freed from prison by angelic intervention (Acts 12), Paul and Silas released after Philippian earthquake (Acts 16). God's timing, though sometimes delayed from human perspective, comes swiftly when His purposes require.

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Study Questions

1. From what captivity has Christ loosed you? How does remembering this deepen gratitude?
2. In what areas do you still feel in bondage, needing God's hastening deliverance?
3. How has God provided 'bread' (spiritual nourishment) when you feared failing?

Interlinear Text

מֶה רַ	צֶפֶה	לְהִפָּתֵחַ	וְלֹא	יָמֹוֹת
hasteneth	The captive exile	that he may be loosed	H3808	and that he should not die
H4116	H6808	H6605		H4191
לְשֵׁן חַת	וְלֹא אֶ	יִחָסֵר רַ	לֶחֶמוֹ:	
in the pit	H3808	should fail	nor that his bread	
H7845		H2637	H3899	

Additional Cross-References

Isaiah 48:20 (Parallel theme): Go ye forth of Babylon, flee ye from the Chaldeans, with a voice of singing declare ye, tell this, utter it even to the end of the earth; say ye, The LORD hath redeemed his servant Jacob.

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.

Isaiah 52:2 (Parallel theme): Shake thyself from the dust; arise, and sit down, O Jerusalem: loose thyself from the bands of thy neck, O captive daughter of Zion.

Isaiah 49:10 (Parallel theme): They shall not hunger nor thirst; neither shall the heat nor sun smite them: for he that hath mercy on them shall lead them, even by the springs of water shall he guide them.

Ezra 1:5 (Parallel theme): Then rose up the chief of the fathers of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests, and the Levites, with all them whose spirit God had raised, to go up to build the house of the LORD which is in Jerusalem.