

Book of Isaiah



Chapter 20

Theme: Unfulfilled Prophecy (continued)

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Chapter 20

The one great thought in chapter 20 is that in three years Israel would be invaded. Chapter 19 is closed on the high note of future blessing for Egypt in the millennial Kingdom, and this chapter predicts coming events in the near future, which will prove the reliability of Isaiah as a prophet of God.¹

20:1-6 Naked And Barefoot

Chapter 20 is a brief historical note inserted in the midst of the oracles. Isaiah wanted the Jews to be sure that this was not the time to try and ally with Egypt. When the Philistine city of Ashdod fell to the Assyrians, the Jews were certainly thinking that they needed to turn to Egypt for an alliance.

God told Isaiah to dress as a prisoner of war, to illustrate that if Israel turned to Ethiopia or Egypt, they would be joining them on their march towards slavery.²

¹In the year that the commander in chief, who was sent by Sargon the king of Assyria, came to Ashdod and fought against it and captured it—

Tartan: title of the commander-in-chief of the Assyrian army (2 Kgs 18:17).

[In the year that Tartan came unto Ashdod] The purpose of this chapter is to warn Israel not to depend upon Egypt and Ethiopia for assistance against the king of Assyria, but to trust in God as the only source of help. Assyria had already conquered Syria and Ephraim and had taken Philistia, so was now ready to come against Judah (2Ki. 16:5 -- 2Ki. 18:37).³

[Sargon the king of Assyria] Sargon, perhaps Sennacherib.

Tartan was a general in the Assyrian army, mentioned in 2Kings 18:17. Ashdod was a city in the northern kingdom of ten tribes. Sargon succeeded Shalmaneser (see 2Kings 17:3).

This is the only place the name of Sargon is mentioned in the Bible. As recent as one hundred years ago historians maintained that Sargon never lived, because they could find no reference to him in secular history. However, archaeologists discovered that the Assyrian form of his name is Sharrukin. Abundant historical materials concerning his reign have come down to us.⁴

¹ Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee.

² <http://rondaniel.com/library/23-Isaiah/Isaiah1428.php>

³ Dake's Annotated Reference Bible

⁴ Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee.

Sargon II was king of Assyria from 722-705 B.C., and this event happened in 711 B.C. Isaiah graphically reminds Judah that they should not count on foreign alliances to protect them.⁵

Ashdod. It was one of the five Philistine cities and was located near the Mediterranean Sea about 18 miles northeast of Gaza. The city rebelled against Assyria in 713 BC under King Azuri. In 1963 three fragments of at least one Assyrian monument commemorating Sargon's victory (in 711) were discovered at Ashdod.⁶

In the year that Tartan came to Ashdod: This describes the time when the army of Assyria conquered the Philistine city of Assyria. Isaiah's sign is a response to this victory of Assyria.

This invasion has a concrete marking point in secular history: 711 B.C.

The Philistines were both neighbors and thorns to Israel, and the fall of Ashdod would certainly make Israel think, "We're next. We need protection."⁷

²at that time the Lord spoke by Isaiah the son of Amoz, saying, "Go, and loose the sackcloth from your waist and take off your sandals from your feet," and he did so, walking naked and barefoot.

Four predictions -- fulfilled:

- As Isaiah, a sign and wonder, walked naked (without his outer garment) and barefoot for three years in Israel, so the Assyrians shall lead both Egyptians and Ethiopians naked and barefoot into captivity (Isa. 20:3-4).
- Egypt will be ashamed of being led away captive in nakedness (Isa. 20:4).
- Judah shall be afraid and ashamed of their trust in both Egypt and Ethiopia (Isa. 20:5).
- Judah shall say in that day that such is what we get for trusting in them -- where shall we flee to for help to be delivered from the Assyrians (Isa. 20:6)?⁸

Isaiah a Sign

God made Isaiah a sign and a wonder to his people by his walking among them for three years naked and barefooted (Isa. 20:2-3). He was not nude; he simply laid aside his special prophetic garment, his outer robe, as Saul did (1Sam. 19:24), and David who was naked but still had on a linen ephod (2Sam. 6:14-21). These kings merely put off their royal robes, just as Peter put off his outer garment so that he could fish (Jn. 21:7). Isaiah's outer robe was evidently sackcloth of coarse goat hair, for the prophets wore rough clothing as their prophetic garments (1Ki. 1:8; Mt. 3:4). False prophets were forbidden to wear rough garments to deceive (Zech. 13:4).⁹

Isaiah was to become a walking parable to Israel as a warning not to become confederate with Egypt. Probably Isaiah was not asked to go in the nude. Clothing was and is so essential to the customs of the East and nudity is so revolting that it is obvious that this was not intended. Isaiah was to lay aside his outward tunic of mourning. This would attract immediate and startling

⁵ Life Application Study Bible.

⁶ NIV First Century Bible Notes

⁷ <http://www.studylight.org/commentaries/guz/isaiah-20.html>

⁸ Dake's Annotated Reference Bible

⁹ Dake's Annotated Reference Bible

attention to the prophet. It would enable Isaiah to make his point publicly. It is well to note the words of F. Delitzsch at this point: "What Isaiah was therefore directed to do was simply opposed to common custom and not to moral decency."¹⁰

God's command to Isaiah to walk about naked for three years was a humiliating experience. God was using Isaiah to demonstrate the humiliation that Egypt and Ethiopia would experience at the hands of Assyria. But the message was really for Judah: Don't put your trust in foreign governments, or you will experience this kind of shame from your captors. Human governments and institutions can never take God's place.

God asked Isaiah to do something that seemed shameful and illogical. At times, God may ask us to take steps we don't understand. We must obey God in complete faith, for he will never ask us to do something wrong.¹¹

Remove the sackcloth from your body, and take your sandals off your feet: Before this, Isaiah wore an outer garment of sackcloth - clothes of mourning. Now, God tells him to remove his outer garment of sackcloth, and to take his sandals off.

"God would sometimes have his prophets to add to their word a visible sign, to awaken people's minds to a more serious consideration of the matters proposed to them." (Poole)

And he did so, walking naked and barefoot: We shouldn't think that Isaiah was nude, completely without clothing. Instead, he only wore the inner garment customary in that day - sort of like wearing only your underwear or a nightshirt. The message wasn't nudity, it was complete poverty and humiliation. Isaiah dressed as the poorest and most destitute would dress.

"One need not imagine that Isaiah walked around stripped for the entire three years or that Ezekiel lay on his side for 390 days without getting up (Ezekiel 4:9). Perhaps part of each day was used for those designated purposes." (Wolf)

"Not stark naked, but stripped as a prisoner, his mantle or upper garment cast off." (Trapp)

"Other prophets were asked to go through equally difficult experiences as signs to Israel. Hosea endured a trying marriage, and Ezekiel's wife died as an illustration for the nation (Ezekiel 24:16-24)." (Wolf)¹²

³Then the Lord said, "As my servant Isaiah has walked naked and barefoot for three years as a sign and a portent against Egypt and Cush,

[three years for a sign and wonder upon Egypt and upon Ethiopia] The three years here must be the same as those mentioned in Isa. 16:14. Within three years Moab, Egypt, and Ethiopia were to be destroyed.¹³

Isaiah was to walk through Israel to let them know what would happen to Egypt. As he walked, we are told, he would be for a sign and wonder for the people.¹⁴

¹⁰ Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee.

¹¹ Life Application Study Bible.

¹² <http://www.study-light.org/commentaries/guz/isaiah-20.html>

¹³ Dake's Annotated Reference Bible

¹⁴ Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee.

Isaiah replaced wearing sackcloth, the garb of spiritual mourning, with walking naked and barefoot, signs of being exiled into captivity. servant: For a similar usage, see 41:8. Three years means “involving three years,” a minimum of fourteen months. a sign and a wonder: For a similar usage, see 8:18.¹⁵

My servant Isaiah has walked naked and barefoot three years as a sign and wonder against Egypt: Under the command of the LORD, Isaiah dressed in this poor and humble way for three years. It was a message against Egypt, because the king of Assyria would lead away the Egyptians as prisoners.

As the Assyrians took the Egyptians captive, they would humiliate them by stripping them and leading them away as prisoners. This would all be to the shame of Egypt.

“So dealeth the devil with all his wretched captives, whom he driveth away hellward, naked and barefoot with their buttocks uncovered, the shame of their nakedness exposed to public view for want of the white raiment of Christ’s righteousness that they might be clothed.” (Trapp)¹⁶

⁴so shall the king of Assyria lead away the Egyptian captives and the Cushite exiles, both the young and the old, naked and barefoot, with buttocks uncovered, the nakedness of Egypt.

Since Egypt could not protect herself (nor could Ethiopia), she would not be a reliable ally for Israel. Both Egypt and Ethiopia were invaded by Sargon of Assyria, and this shame which Isaiah had predicted came upon Egypt.¹⁷

⁵Then they shall be dismayed and ashamed because of Cush their hope and of Egypt their boast.

They shall be afraid and ashamed of Ethiopia their expectation and Egypt their glory: When God judges Ethiopia and Egypt, it will be evident how foolish it was for Judah to look to them for protection against Assyria.

Whenever our expectation is in something wrong, or our glory is in something wrong, the LORD will find a way to make those things disappoint us. Judah set their expectation on Ethiopia, and looked to Egypt for glory, but now they are left afraid and ashamed.

“There is no place of security for the people of God, other than that to be found in the rule of God. All expectation not centered in God, is doomed to disappointment and discomfiture.” (Morgan)¹⁸

¹⁵ The Nelson Study Bible

¹⁶ <http://www.studylight.org/commentaries/guz/isaiah-20.html>

¹⁷ Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee

¹⁸ <http://www.studylight.org/commentaries/guz/isaiah-20.html>

6And the inhabitants of this coastland will say in that day, ‘Behold, this is what has happened to those in whom we hoped and to whom we fled for help to be delivered from the king of Assyria! And we, how shall we escape?’”

[isle] The word isle is often used of any coastal or maritime country. Here it is applied to Palestine on the Mediterranean.

[how shall we escape?] They learned that their escape was Jehovah; He sent an angel who killed 185,000 Assyrians and caused the others to flee (Isa. 37:36-38).¹⁹

'Dwellers of this coastland' refers most likely to the Ashdodites, who instigated the revolt against Assyria; the Philistine city of Ashdod is located on the coast. Many rabbinic commentators suggest, however, that "coastland" refers to the whole land of Israel, including the hill country where the Judeans lived.²⁰

How shall we escape? The LORD allowed Judah to be backed into a corner, caught between two mighty Empires (Egypt and Assyria), without being able to trust either one. There was no escape - except in the LORD.

Because of the glorious promise of revival and restoration among Egypt in Isaiah 19, Judah might have been even more tempted to say, “Well, we can trust in Egypt. They are all going to come to the LORD someday anyway!” But with the dramatic three-year sign, Isaiah shows Judah how vain it was to make Egypt their expectation or glory.²¹

Inhabitants of this Isle: The LXX gives a rendering which speaks better of the "inhabitants of this isle" than the history recorded in Kings and Isaiah does. The KJV rendering places the onus on the inhabitants for making wrong choices and seems to be a good translation of the Hebrew while the LXX mitigates the degree of guilt by an acknowledgment of the inhabitants being fooled. The Literal Hebrew reads: "Behold, Thus (is) our security to which we had fled for help to be delivered from the king of Assyria. How then shall we escape?" The LXX reads "Behold we have surely been persuaded to flee to those for help who are not able to save from the King of Assyria and how shall we be saved?"²²

¹⁹ Dake's Annotated Reference Bible

²⁰ The Jewish Study Bible

²¹ <http://www.studylight.org/commentaries/guz/isaiah-20.html>

²² <http://www.moellerhaus.com/20.htm>