
Isaiah 20

The inhabitants of Ashdod had rebelled against Assyria and the latter sieged the place and recovered it. The people had thought to obtain protection against Assyria from Egypt and Cush. Instead, they ought to have leaned upon the Lord. To show the useless idea of leaning on Egypt and Cush, the Prophet Isaiah is asked to go barefoot and in his undergarments for three years, as a sign that Egypt would soon be devastated by Assyria and be reduced to complete humiliation. Even that Egypt upon whom Judah was so apt to lean on despite the Lord's warnings. Nägelsbach summarizes: "In the year when the Tartan, i.e. commander-in-chief of king Sargon of Assyria, came against Ashdod to besiege the city ... Isaiah received commandment from the Lord to take off his garment made of bad sack linen and his sandals, and to go about naked and barefoot. For the incredible thing shall happen that the Egyptians and Ethiopians, shall be compelled to go into captivity naked and barefoot, like Isaiah goes about. Thereupon all inhabitants of the sea-board of Palestine [AMP explains, "the inhabitants of this coastland {the Israelites and their neighbors}"], will, with terror and shame, be sensible how wrong they were to confide in the power and glory of Ethiopia and Egypt. They will say: Thus it has gone with the power from whom we expected protection; how now shall it go with us?"

vv. 1–6. The people ask, if Egypt will be so punished, what will happen to us who have leaned on her for support? Only when we lean on the Lord can we be safe.

1 ¶ In the year that Tartan came unto Ashdod, (when Sargon the king of Assyria sent him,) and fought against Ashdod, and took it;

In the year that Tartan came unto Ashdod. Of Ashdod, we know it was one of the five principal cities governed by the Philistines, and at one time assigned to Judah (ISBE). *Tartan* [תַּרְטָן] was a high military office, such as commander or general. ¶ (*When Sargon the king of Assyria sent him, and fought against Ashdod, and took it.* Barnes has, "Ashdod, called by the Greeks Azotus, was a seaport on the Mediterranean, between Askelon and Ekron, and not far from Gaza (Reland's *Palestine*, iii.) It was one of the five cities of the Philistines, assigned to the tribe of Judah, but never conquered by them (Joshua 13:8; Joshua 15:46–47). The temple of Dagon stood here; and here the ark of God was brought after the fatal battle of Eben-ezer (1 Samuel 5:1 ff.) It sustained many sieges, and was regarded as an important place in respect to Palestine,¹ and also to Egypt." ¶ Rawlinson explains: "Egypt and Ethiopia were at the time united under one head, Shabak, or Shabatok; and the inhabitants of Ashdod looked to this quarter for deliverance from the Assyrian power. Shortly after the first capture, they revolted, deposed the

¹ Speaking of the region between the Mediterranean and the Jordan, which I prefer to call the Holy Land.

king whom Sargon had set over them, appointed another, and then proceeded, in conjunction with Philistia, Judah, Edom, and Moab, to call in the aid of the Egyptians and Ethiopians. Isaiah's mission on this occasion was to discourage Judaea from joining Ashdod and her allies in this appeal. He was instructed to prophesy that Assyria would shortly inflict a severe defeat on the two African powers, and carry into captivity large numbers of both nations. The prophecy seems to have had its accomplishment about twelve years later, when Sennacherib defeated the combined forces of Egypt and Ethiopia at Eltekeh, near Ekron (G. Smith, *Eponym Canon*, p. 133)."

2 At the same time spake the LORD by ¶ Isaiah the son of Amoz, saying, Go and loose the sackcloth from off thy loins, and put off thy shoe from thy foot. And he did so, walking naked and barefoot.

✓ by the hand of

At the same time spake the LORD by Isaiah the son of Amoz, saying, Go and loose the sackcloth from off thy loins, and put off thy shoe from thy foot. The LXX (6) translates it as, "Loose thy sandals from off thy feet." ¶ The Lord frequently used this teaching method of giving a "sign and a wonder," by asking His prophets to dress or appear, or act or behave in certain ways, as an object lesson. For instance, Jeremiah was commanded to take off his belt or girdle, and to place it in a hole wherein he had to dig, only to find it completely decomposed when he came back for it, "Thus saith the LORD, After this manner will I mar the pride of Judah, and the great pride of Jerusalem. This evil people, which refuse to hear my words, which walk in the

imagination of their heart, and walk after other gods, to serve them, and to worship them, shall even be as this girdle, which is good for nothing” (Jeremiah 13:9–10, see ISAIAH 13:1–15). Young says, “Isaiah recounts the revelation by saying that ‘The Lord spake through the hand of Isaiah.’ As in the seventh chapter so here the prophet objectifies himself. The expression ‘hand of Isaiah’ simply indicates the person, or instrumentality, or power of Isaiah. God had once spoken to Pharaoh through the hand of Moses (Exodus 9:35b) ... The word ‘hand’ thus designates the revelation of God as it is delivered by the prophet.” ¶ *And he did so, walking naked and barefoot.* The LXX (Ⓞ) has, “And do thus, going naked and barefoot,” and adds, “having the shame of Egypt exposed.” The Talmud tradition (Seder Mo’ed, Shabbath 114a) explains it: “‘Naked’ means in worn-out garments; ‘barefoot’ in patched shoes” (Talmud, Soncino). Rotherham, pointing to the word naked as a state of not being fully dressed rather than having absolutely no clothes on, has, “And he did so, walking disrobed and barefoot.” SOT reads, “And he did so, walking dismantled and barefoot.” AMP explains, “And he had done so, walking around stripped [to his loincloth] and barefoot.” ¶ Thus it is that we may say to someone, “I am not dressed,” but not necessarily mean we have nothing on, but rather, that we do not feel we can be seen in public. Young writes, “Isaiah need not be thought of as having gone about completely naked. This is shown by the addition of the word ‘barefoot.’ Had he been completely naked, there would be no need for this additional description.” Delitzsch explains, “What Isaiah was directed to do, therefore, was simply opposed to common custom, and not to moral decency. He was to lay aside the dress of a mourner and preacher of repentance, and to have nothing on but his tunic (cetoneh); and in this, as well as barefooted, he was to show himself in public. This was the costume of a man who had been robbed and disgraced, or else of a beggar or prisoner of war.”

3 And the LORD said, Like as my servant Isaiah hath walked naked and barefoot three years [for] a sign and wonder upon Egypt and upon Ethiopia;

And the LORD said, Like as my servant Isaiah hath walked naked and barefoot three years. Isaiah has been honored, here, with the title, **עֲבָדִי יֵשַׁעְיָהוּ**, “my servant Yeshayahu.” ¶ [For] a sign and wonder upon Egypt and upon Ethiopia. The LXX (Ⓞ) has, “There shall be three years for signs and wonders to the Egyptians and Ethiopians.” The Syriac (Ⓢ) has: “So shall there be signs and wonders for three years upon Egypt and upon Ethiopia.” Or more properly, as the

NAS (and NIV, SOT) has it, “Three years as a sign and token against Egypt and Cush.” Henry writes, “It was intended to signify that the Egyptians and the Ethiopians should be led away captive by the king of Assyria, thus stripped, or in rags, and very shabby clothing, as Isaiah was.” Delitzsch has, “The strange and unseemly dress of the prophet, whenever he appeared in his official capacity for three whole years, was a prediction of the fall of the Egypto-Ethiopian kingdom, which was to take place at the end of these three years... Egypt and Ethiopia are as closely connected here as Israel [Ephraim] and Judah in ISAIAH 11:12. They were at that time one kingdom, so that the shame of Egypt was the shame of Ethiopia.” A number of scholars have alternatively argued that perhaps Isaiah walked for three days, or time periods, symbolic of three years, and that the three years represent the period of captivity that Egypt and Ethiopia would be submitted to. The one thing that is certain is that this event must have really been imprinted in the minds of all who saw it. ¶ **עַל-מִצְרַיִם וְעַל-כּוּשׁ**, upon Egypt and upon Ethiopia. Just as in English we know Mitzraim as Egypt, so Cush is known as Ethiopia.

4 So shall the king of Assyria lead away the Egyptians prisoners, and the Ethiopians captives, young and old, naked and barefoot, even with [their] buttocks uncovered, to the shame of Egypt.

✓ the captivity of Egypt ✓ ✓ nakedness

So shall the king of Assyria lead away the Egyptians prisoners, and the Ethiopians captives. Both of these sister nations would be carried away captives by Assyria. ¶ *Young and old, naked and barefoot, even with [their] buttocks uncovered, to the shame of Egypt.* Henderson writes, “On the royal tombs at Thebes are representations of captives led away in triumph, either in a state of complete nudity, or with a small scarf suspended round their loins, and hanging down in front.” This was one of the ways prisoners were often humiliated by their captors.

5 And they shall be afraid and ashamed of Ethiopia their expectation, and of Egypt their glory.

The LXX (Ⓞ) explains this verse thus, “And the Egyptians being defeated shall be ashamed of the Ethiopians, in whom they had trusted; for they were their glory.” The Syriac (Ⓢ) has, “And they shall be defeated and ashamed of Ethiopia their trust, and of Egypt their glory.” I rather think, as it further developed

in ISAIAH 20:6, that Israel shall be ashamed for having once put her trust on Egypt and on Cush. When it says *they shall be afraid* we have an elliptical expression missing, they day will come when Israel will be afraid because their expectation of safety to be provided by Egypt and Ethiopia will fail. They will be afraid with no one to turn to, with no human arm to turn to. Rotherham translates both adjectives as those of fear: “Thus shall they be confounded and turn pale,—For Ethiopia, their expectation, and For Egypt their boast.”

6 And the inhabitant of this isle[✓] shall say in that day, Behold, such [is] our expectation, whither we flee for help to be delivered from the king of Assyria: and how shall we escape?

✓ or, country

And the inhabitant of this isle shall say in that day. Many versions use the word coastland for *isle* giving the idea of Israel. Delitzsch has, “~~is~~”, which signifies both an **island** and a **coast-land**, is used as the name of Philistia (Zephaniah 2:5), and as the name of Phoenicia in ISAIAH 23:2, 6; and for this reason Knobel and others understand it here as denoting the former with the inclusion of the latter. But as the Assyrians had already attacked both Phoenicians and Philistines at the time when they marched against Egypt, there can be no doubt that Isaiah had chiefly the Judaeans in his mind. This was the interpretation given by Jerome (‘*Judah trusted in the Egyptians, and Egypt will be destroyed*’), and it has been adopted by Ewald, Drechsler, Luzzatto,

and Meier. The expressions are the same as those in which a little further on we find Isaiah reproving the Egyptian tendencies of Judah’s policy. At the same time, by ‘the inhabitant of this coast-land’ we are not to understand Judah exclusively, but the inhabitants of Palestine generally, with whom Judah was mixed up to its shame, because it had denied its character as the nation of Jehovah in a manner so thoroughly opposed to its theocratic standing.” ¶ *Behold, such [is] our expectation, whither we flee for help to be delivered from the king of Assyria: and how shall we escape?* The Targum (Ⓒ) reads, “To which we were hoping to flee for help to be delivered from before the king of Assyria, if hitherto they could not deliver themselves, how shall we be delivered?” The LXX (Ⓔ) has, “Behold, we trusted to flee to them for help, who could not save themselves from the king of the Assyrians: and how shall we be saved?” The Syriac (Ⓔ) renders it, “Behold, here is our trust, to whom we fled for help to be delivered from the king of Assyria; and how shall we escape?” The Douay version has, “Lo, this was our hope, to whom we fled for help, to deliver us from the face of the king of the Assyrians. And how shall we be able to escape?” Fausset explains the question: “If Egypt, in which we trusted, was overcome, how shall we, a small weak state, escape?” Gladly, there is *always* an escape. We must pray the Father in the name of the Holy One of Israel, even Jesus the Christ.

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