

Isaiah Chapter 20

Verses 1-6: This prophecy is dated in the year of the Assyrian invasion of the Philistine coast (in 711 B.C.). Tartan is an Akkadian military title (2 Kings 18:17). He was sent by Sargon to subdue the Philistine city of Ashdod. God then instructs Isaiah to become a living illustration of His coming judgment by walking naked and barefoot like a captive slave.

Egypt and Ethiopia would be taken into captivity by Assyria, which was known not only for stripping its captives naked, but in some cases peeling their skin off while they were still alive.

Isaiah 20:1 "In the year that Tartan came unto Ashdod (when Sargon the king of Assyria sent him,) and fought against Ashdod, and took it;"

Tartan was an office, not a person's name. It means commander in chief.

Sargon seemed to be in power (about 722 to 705 B.C.). Ashdod was one of the 5 largest Philistine cities, all located southwest of Jerusalem. Sargon, mentioned only here in the Bible, was Sargon II, king of Assyria (from 722-705 B.C.).

Ashdod was one of the five most important cities of the Philistines. Tartan was commander in chief of the Assyrian army. It seems Sargon sent him to come against the Philistines. He did and won the battle.

The Assyrians captured Ashdod (in 711 B.C.), and so frightened the Egyptians that they backed away, thus teaching Judah the folly of reliance on a foreign power such as Egypt for protection.

Isaiah 20:2 "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."

“At that time”: Isaiah began his object lesson 3 years (verse 3), before his speech (in verses 3-6), which came just prior to the Assyrian attack (in 711 B.C.).

This seems like a very strange thing to do, but Isaiah did as God had told him. This could have meant stripped of his outer garment, as most suppose.

“Sackcloth”: This apparel may denote Isaiah’s mourning or it may signify his prophetic office.

“Naked and barefoot”: The Lord commanded stripping off all of his outer garments as an act denoting disgrace and humiliation. I believe he was actually naked as the Scripture says. Look, with me, at a Scripture where the word naked in the same sense was used.

Job 1:21 And said, Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD."

You can see from this that this means totally without clothing. We find this has a great purpose in the fact that the Jews were looking to earthly sources to save them. The LORD probably had Isaiah to do this to remind them that they came into this world naked, and their only help lay in the LORD.

Sackcloth is a garment of mourning. Man is useless to provide for himself. God must intervene for them, or they would not be saved. This is showing they must be stripped of everything they had, before they would realize who their provider was. Isaiah is in total obedience to God.

Isaiah 20:3 "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;"

“My servant” designates that places Isaiah among a select group such as Abraham, Moses and others. Isaiah’s nakedness and bare feet symbolized the coming desolation and shame of Egypt and Ethiopia at the hands of the Assyrians.

Three years are an important length of time throughout the Bible. We find that Jesus' formal ministry upon the earth lasted 3-½ years. Even in Daniel, he speaks of time, times, and half a time. I could go on and mention many others, but I believe you see the connection with this time.

Isaiah and his family had been a sign to others, even in their names. Notice, God calls Isaiah by a special name given to just a few of His followers. He used "my" when He called Isaiah servant. Had he been partially clothed, it would not have made much impression on the people he was a sign to.

This sign was from God to them as a reminder. Their trust must not be in Egypt, or in Assyria, or even in Judah, but in the One True God. The three years showed the captivity would not be a short one.

Isaiah 20:4 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.

“Captives ... exiles”: Esarhaddon, king of Assyria, fulfilled this prophecy (in 671 B.C.). Far from being a suitable object of Judah’s trust, mighty Egypt will go off in shame.

In this instance, it is stressing clearly that they carried nothing with them when they were captured. If they were naked when they were captured, they did not give them time to return and dress. No one was spared. They captured young and old, men and women. They did not give them time to even put their shoes on.

This was such an embarrassment, because they were caught totally off guard. Egypt had been a proud, powerful nation. Far from being a suitable object of Judah’s trust, mighty Egypt will go off in shame as now they are carried away with nothing, not even clothes on their back.

Isaiah 20:5 "And they shall be afraid and ashamed of Ethiopia their expectation, and of Egypt their glory."

They had expected Ethiopia to help them, and Ethiopia could not even help themselves. Egypt had been a very powerful country. They were thought to be one of the grandest countries in the area. They had trusted in someone who looked good on the surface, but lost the war.

Isaiah 20:6 "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?"

This is not really an island, but a strip of land which was next to the sea. There was no place to escape but into the sea, and that would be certain death.

“We” refers to the people of Judah. Trust in Egypt has proven itself misplaced. Is there any adequate source of help?

Isaiah Chapter 20 Questions

1. What is the word Tartan?
2. What does it mean?
3. What was Ashdod?
4. Who captured Ashdod?
5. In what year?”
6. Who was the father of Isaiah?
7. What did God tell Isaiah to do (In verse 2)?
8. What does the author believe about this?
9. What is sackcloth?
10. What was Isaiah showing the people by doing this?
11. In verse 3, how long did Isaiah walk naked and barefoot?
12. What special name did God use for Isaiah?
13. What was the reminder that God meant by this sign?
14. What did the 3 years show?

15. How did the king of Assyria lead the Egyptians and Ethiopians captive?
16. In what year was this done?
17. Were they allowed to carry anything with them?
18. Who had the Egyptians counted on to help them?
19. And did they?
20. Why?
21. In verse 6, who does the “we” refer to?