

**CALVARY PANDAN
BIBLE-PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

**DHW BIBLE CLASS
LESSON 20
THE BOOK OF ISAIAH
CHAPTER 20**

Theme: “How the Mighty will Fall!”

THEME VERSE

Isaiah 20:3-4 (KJV) “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; 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.”

INTRODUCTION

Nation fighting against nation is the perennial norm of man’s history. This will never change. Sinful man will never learn from his own history and grievous mistakes. Thousands of lives will continuously be lost due to these wars. Wars are fought and will continue to be fought to satisfy the insatiable appetites of tyrants. These warmongers breed more warmongers. They praise one another over their conquests of weaker nations. Superpowers today are merely following in the footsteps of past dictators. This only gets worse with time as sinful men have created

weapons of mass destruction to accelerate their own doom.

However, the days of Isaiah were different. The behaviour and conduct of the superpowers in the Middle Eastern regions played a part in the struggle and discipline of the nation of Israel, especially prior to the first coming of Jesus Christ. Egypt, Assyria and Ethiopia were three such nations. Isaiah 20 reveals the political intrigues of these three nations where Assyria was then the superpower and Egypt was in the decline in her influence.

The rise and fall of these Middle Eastern superpowers will affect Israel in ways that have eternal consequences. The rise of Assyria will be followed by the Babylonians and then the Greeks, and finally the Romans. All of these superpowers are nothing but pawns in the Master’s hand. He will do with them what He deems best to accomplish His sovereign plan of salvation for mankind through Jesus Christ, His anointed Saviour of the whole world. Isaiah 20 describes a very unique episode in Isaiah’s life where he was commanded by the LORD to reveal God’s will to them by way of a very humiliating life demonstration. The length that a prophet of the LORD has to go through to send a message is remarkable!

OUTLINE

1. The Assyrians come (v.1);
2. Isaiah’s naked revelation (v. 2);
3. Egypt and Ethiopia will be naked (vv. 3-6);

COMMENTARY

The Assyrians Come

The following event of Isaiah's revelation from the LORD came in the year when Tartan came to capture Ashdod, one of the fortified cities of the Philistines located on the shores of the Mediterranean Sea. Tartan was sent by Sargon, the King of Assyria. Sargon was a general mentioned in 2 Kings 18:17. It seems that this Assyrian king reigned during the time of King Hezekiah. However, Assyrians were well known to possess many names. Exactly who was this Sargon is difficult to ascertain with a degree of certainty.

Barnes commented, "This prophecy occupies this single chapter. Its design and scope is not difficult to understand. The time when it was delivered is designated in v. 1, and was manifestly in the reign of Hezekiah. The Assyrian empire had extended its conquests over Syria, Damascus, and Ephraim or Samaria (2 Kings 18:9-12.) The king of Assyria sent Tartan to take possession of Ashdod, or Azotus, the maritime key of Palestine, and there was evident danger that the Assyrians would overthrow the government of Judah, and secure also the conquest of Egypt. In these circumstances of danger, the main reliance of Judah was on aid that they hoped to derive from Egypt and Ethiopia. (v.5) Alone they would not be able to repel the Assyrians. They relied on that aid rather than on God. To "recall" them from this, to show them the vanity of such dependence, and to lead them to rely on God, Isaiah was sent to them to be a sign; or to indicate by symbolic action what would be the

fate of the Egyptians on whom they were placing their reliance (v. 4). By showing the Jews what would be the destiny of Egypt, he planned to stop them from relying on Egypt, and to turn back to God for protection and aid.

"In the year that Tartan came unto Ashdod - Tartan was one of the generals of Sennacherib. 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 (Josh. 13:8; 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 Sam. 5:1, following.) It sustained many sieges, and was regarded as an important place in respect to Palestine, and also to Egypt. It was taken by Tartan, and remained in the possession of the Assyrians until it was besieged by Psammetichus, the Egyptian king who took it after a siege of twenty-nine years (Herod. ii. 157). It was about thirty miles from Gaza. It is now a small village called "Esdud." It was besieged and taken by Tartan as preparatory to the conquest of Egypt; and if the king who is here called "Sargon" was Sennacherib, it is probable that it was taken before he threatened Jerusalem.

"Sargon the king of Assyria - Who this 'Sargon' was is not certainly known. Some have supposed that it was Sennacherib; others that it was Shalmaneser the father of

Sennacherib, and others that it was Esar-haddon the successor of Sennacherib - (Michaelis). Rosenmuller and Gesenius suppose that it was a king who reigned "between" Shalmaneser and Sennacherib. Tartan is known to have been a general of Sennacherib (2 Kings 18:17) and it is natural to suppose that he is here intended. Jerome says that Senacherib had seven names, and Kimchi says that he had eight; and it is not improbable that 'Sargon' was one of those names. Oriental princes often had several names; and hence, the difficulty of identifying them."

Ashdod was located along the Way of the Sea which links Mesopotamia to Egypt. It was either go through Israel and Judah to reach Egypt or simply march through Philistine territory which was what the Assyrian King had instructed Tartan to do. Ashdod stood in his way and had to be captured before he reached Egypt. So Ashdod was taken. How long it took, the Bible does not say.

Isaiah's Naked Revelation

The ministry of a prophet is an unenviable calling in many ways. There is none more so than when he is called to demonstrate God's will or revelation by means of his life. In the case of Hosea it was to marry a harlot, and Jeremiah was commanded by the LORD not to marry. Here Isaiah was ordered to walk naked and barefoot before all Israel. The word for naked is the same word used in Genesis 2 to describe the nakedness of Adam and Eve (Genesis 2:25).

Does it mean that Isaiah was really naked without a stitch of clothing on him? Isaiah was wearing a sackcloth when this command was issued as Tartan was capturing Ashdod and on his way to Egypt. He was commanded to go and loose his sackcloth from off his loins. This may probably refer to only the lower portion of his body being naked rather than his entire body. That he was to expose his buttocks is certain as this was what the LORD declared will happen to the Egyptians and Ethiopians in verse 4. The word for naked could also refer to partial nakedness as well as full nakedness as was the case with Adam and Eve. Isaiah was probably only naked from the waist down with his inner tunic intact. This meant that every time Isaiah went out and do his "walkabout" he would be naked as explained above. When he was at home for his meals, sleep and rest, he would be properly dressed.

He was also told to take off his shoe from off his foot. Then he was to walk naked and barefoot. Bare feet symbolizes one who is mourning and in captivity. Therefore by his life he demonstrated to Egypt and Ethiopia that they would be stripped naked and humiliated by the Assyrians and would become slaves to the Assyrians.

Pertaining to the issue of Isaiah's nakedness, John Calvin argues for total nakedness. He wrote, "A question arises, was this actually done, or was it merely and simply a vision which he told to the people? The general opinion is, that the Prophet never went naked, but that this was

exhibited to him in a vision, and only once. They allege as a reason, that on account of heat and cold, and other inconveniences of the weather, he could not have walked naked during the whole period of three years. What if we should say that the Prophet wore clothes at home, and also in public, unless when he wished to come forth to teach, and that on such occasions he was accustomed to present to the people a spectacle of nakedness? I pay little attention to the argument, that he was unable to endure heat and cold; for God, who commanded him to do this, could easily strengthen and protect him. But they assign another reason, that nakedness would have been unbecoming in a Prophet. I answer, this nakedness was not more unbecoming than circumcision, which irreligious men might consider to be the most absurd of all sights, because it made an exposure of the uncomely parts. Yet it must not be thought that the Prophet went entirely naked, or without covering those parts which would present a revolting aspect. It was enough that the people understood what the Lord was doing, and were affected by it as something extraordinary.”

Calvin continues, “I am led to form this opinion by what is here said, *“By the hand of Isaiah;”* for although this mode of expression frequently occurs elsewhere, still we never find it where it does not imply something emphatic, to describe the effect produced. He places himself in the midst between God and his countrymen, so as to be the herald of a future calamity, not only in words, but likewise by a visible

symbol. Nor is it superfluous that it is immediately added, *He did so.* I am therefore of opinion that Isaiah walked naked whenever he discharged the office of a prophet, and that he uncovered those parts which could be beheld without shame.”

Sometimes it is our own sense of modesty and modern day decorum that dictates our understanding of the biblical text. This should not be. Calvin is right to make his assessment and conclusion. Isaiah had to do this for the next 3 years. For the message to be effectively understood, such amazing commands had to be carried by God’s prophet. He is not supposed to add or subtract from the Word of the LORD. Here he is required to not add and subtract from what the LORD demands of his life! It must have been difficult for him to do!

Egypt and Ethiopia will be Naked

By way of Isaiah’s picturesque demonstration of the LORD’s message to Egypt and Ethiopia, the LORD said, that “like as my servant Isaiah . . .” This was a solemn reminder to all prophets that their heart, soul and mind, and lives truly belong to the LORD. He owns and does what He wants with them for His glory and to accomplish His purposes. Isaiah was the LORD’s servant and he must obey his LORD as a faithful servant. It is not his right to choose what he wants to obey what he does not want to obey. Whatever the LORD dictates, he must obey. The LORD made it abundantly clear here that Isaiah walking around naked and bare feet for 3 years was *the* message to Egypt and Ethiopia.

This public demonstration of Isaiah's was a sign and wonder – miracle to Egypt and Ethiopia. They could not miss this message. The three years is obviously not to be understood as literally walked for three years without sleep or food or clothing. The three years referred to a ministry of nakedness and barefoot for that duration. Just like when a person is said to have studied for three years in a Bible College. It does not that he kept on studying non-stop for all that time! As and when Isaiah conducted his ministry he was naked and barefoot!

Just as Isaiah was naked and barefoot so will Egypt and Ethiopia be. Egypt and Ethiopia are located to the south of Israel and Judah. When either Judah or Israel faced a northern enemy it was natural for them to call on these southern powers to help them militarily. They would pay them money or gold and hire them as mercenaries to deal with their enemies in battle. Israel and Judah are God's people. For them to turn to heathen nations for help instead of turning to God is an insult to God. The condemnation of these nations was more for the benefit of Israel and Judah than anyone else! In other words these nations cannot help anyone as they cannot even help themselves when the Assyrians attack them! They would be thoroughly defeated and destroyed as nakedness and barefoot men and women would emphasise.

This understanding is attested by verse 4 which says, "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 victory of the king of Assyria over the Egyptians and Ethiopians is total and complete. He will lead them like cattle away from their homeland to any place he desires. They will become captured slaves. Young and old alike would be taken. The Assyrians will respect no persons in their captivity. They will be publicly humiliated as they walk through towns and cities with their buttocks exposed and barefoot. The physical pain and humiliation would be unbearable. The Assyrians method of taming their captured nations was to transport some of their enemies to other nations and get them to intermarry and practice syncretistic worship. This way they would soon lose their identity.

This was precisely what they did to Israel when they defeated and captured the Israelites (northern kingdom) in 722 B.C. This was the origin of the Samaritans who became a well known people in the gospels. They were half Jews and half Gentiles and hated by both the pure Jews and the Gentiles. They were outcasts that were considered unclean by the Israelites so much so that they would rather make a long detour around Samaria than to go through Samaria when they travelled to and from Jerusalem to Galilee.

The result is that they shall be afraid and ashamed of Ethiopia and their expectation, and of Egypt their glory. The identity of "they" here has to

refer to “the Israelites and Jews.” Both of these nations were prone to appeal to these southern nations for military support. However, when these nations are soundly defeated by the Assyrians they will become afraid as their only source of help is gone. The word for ashamed can also mean confounded. They would be lost or at wits end. Their expectation from these two nations will be dashed. Their glory has disappeared like the dew in the heat of the noonday sun.

The inhabitants of this isle in verse 6 refer to the people of God. They were surrounded by the Mediterranean Sea to the west, the Ammonites to the east, the Moabites and Edomites to the south, and the Syrians and Assyrians to the immediate north. The land of the people of God was really like an island surrounded by hostile enemies. They shall say, “Behold, such *is* our expectation, whither we flee for help to be delivered from the king of Assyria: and how shall we escape?” The people of God are boxed in. They have nowhere else to turn to for help when these nations are decimated by the Assyrians! Now will they look up to the LORD? This was exactly the kind of circumstances the LORD will reduce His people to when they have gone wayward. They must realize that as God’s people it is a sin and an insult to the LORD to turn to others especially heathens for help rather than to the LORD!

PRACTICAL VALUE

The Prophet is a Man Belonging to God

Every believer is a prophet today. As long as he serves the LORD, and teaches and preaches God’s Word he is a prophet. He must rightly divide the Word of truth. With this right understanding and declaration of God’s Word he becomes a modern day prophet. This is not to be associated with the Charismatics’ claim of modern days prophets where they add to Scriptures by their nebulous claims of “God speaking” to them daily outside of the Bible.

True prophets today preach only from the Bible. Just as Isaiah of old belongs entirely to the LORD, so do all the true prophets today. They are forbidden to preach their opinions and ideas. They are to preach only God’s Word. Thus saith the LORD and not man! Therefore whatever the LORD demands of him he must obey and do. Isaiah was an exemplary prophet to obey such a severe command from the LORD! He died to self. Only the glory of the LORD mattered to him. He might humiliate himself and be scorned by the people he ministered to but as long as the LORD was pleased with him, that is all that mattered.

The LORD Renders His Disobedient People Helpless

When God’s children who bear His holy Name live in sin, He will chastise them to bring them back to Himself. This truth is also taught in Hebrews 12. The people of God must not forget whose name they carry. To bear the Name of God means to reflect

His nature and attribute. To do otherwise is to misrepresent God to a world in sin and darkness. They need the true light of Christ to shine through their lives. Instead dark light shines forth when God's people live in sin!

To cause God's people to turn back to Him, the LORD will have to render His people totally helpless. This is the stubbornness in man that they have to be rendered totally helpless before they realise they have sinned against God. Every avenue that man leans on or turns to for help and solitude in times of trouble will be destroyed by God. This way His people have to look up when the enemies are banging on their door!

Do not wait until the LORD destroys every vestige of help in our lives before we learn. The best way is obedience out of love rather than chastisement!

**Turning to Heathens for Help
Instead of God is a Sin**

The people of God constantly fail to remember that turning to outsiders for help when God is only a prayer away is a sin. They insult the LORD. They bear His name and for them to go to others who worship idols to help them in the work of God is to tell the world that God is too weak to and He needs the help of idols to assist Him. This is blasphemy! The LORD is all-powerful and He is the only one and true living God. There is none beside Him. All spiritual ministries in church and in the lives of the people of God must be done by God only and not through sinful men.

This does not mean that sinful men cannot do the work of God when the LORD moves their hearts to contribute. This was the case when God moved the hearts of the king of Persia in the days of Nehemiah and Ezra to provide material free to rebuild the Temple of God. The difference is one of asking. Unbelievers might give tithes and offerings, and place them anonymously into the offering bags without prompting. In this way the LORD can use their gifts for the ministry. Church building projects must be done through the tithes and offerings of God's people only. AMEN.

**DAILY READINGS & DISCUSSION
QUESTIONS**

Daily Readings

MONDAY: Isaiah 20:1-6

TUESDAY: Isaiah 20:1-6

WEDNESDAY: Isaiah 20:1-6

THURSDAY: Isaiah 20:1-6

FRIDAY: Isaiah 20:1-6

Discussion Questions

- 1. Do you see yourself as a prophet of God? Explain your answer.

2. Are you prepared to do whatever the LORD asks of you the way Isaiah obeyed the LORD? Is there anything that the LORD asks of you that you would not do? Explain your answer.

3. If the LORD punishes the Gentiles because of believers who asked them for help, is it not the believers' fault that they are punished?

4. Is the LORD the first person you usually ask first for help or is it man? Is it wrong for an employee to ask unbelievers to help him in his work? Is it wrong for a Christian kindergarten in a church to ask outsiders to teach their children?

5. Have you been embarrassed or persecuted for Christ's sake before? Please share your experience if any. Which is worse, embarrassment or persecution?

6. Have you felt boxed in before where you felt so totally and completely helpless in a situation? Please share your experience. Should Christians feel this way at all?

7. What lessons can you learn from this chapter about God's Word and about yourself?
