

ISAIAH 20 | Naked Isaiah

Naked Isaiah

1 In the year [711 bc] that the commander in chief, who was sent by Sargon the king of Assyria, came to Ashdod, fought against it, and captured it— 2 at that time Yahweh spoke by Isaiah the son of Amoz saying,

Go, loose the sackcloth from your waist, and take off your sandals from your feet.

And he did so, walking naked and barefoot.

Naked Egyptians

3 Then Yahweh said,

As my servant Isaiah has walked naked and barefoot for three years as a sign and a portent against Egypt and Cush, 4 so shall the king of Assyria lead away the Egyptian captives and the Cushite exiles, boys and elders, naked and barefoot, with bare buttocks, the nakedness of Egypt. 5 Then they shall be dismayed and ashamed because of Cush their expectation and of Egypt their beauty. 6 And 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?

Commentary

1. Overview

- a. The historical context is Hezekiah's potential alliance with Egypt against Assyria. A Cushite, Shabako, has consolidated power over Upper and Lower Egypt (714 bc). Now he begins to foment rebellion against Sargon, who is busy quashing revolts in Babylon and Urartu.¹
- b. God's message through Isaiah to Judah is: Don't trust in Egypt! Because of Isaiah's ministry, Hezekiah will avoid alliance with Egypt.²

2. Naked Isaiah (Is 20:1-2).

- a. **Is 20:1-2** 1 In the year [711 bc] that the commander in chief, who was sent by Sargon the king of Assyria, came to Ashdod, fought against it, and captured it— 2 at that time Yahweh spoke by Isaiah the son of Amoz saying, Go, loose the sackcloth from your waist, and take off your sandals from your feet. And he did so, walking naked and barefoot.
- b. Sargon's general captured Ashdod in 711 bc (v. 1).
 - (1) Ashdod, the northernmost of the five great Philistine cities, led a revolt against Sargon in 713 bc. Sargon had set up a king favourable to himself, Ahimiti. However, with the backing of Shabako, Ahimiti was deposed and Yamani made king.³ Ashdod then refused to pay tribute to Assyria.⁴
 - (2) In 711 bc, the Assyrians returned and crushed the revolt. Yamani fled to Egypt for safety, but Shabako, with the Assyrian army on Egypt's border, handed over Yamani to the Assyrians.⁵
- c. At this time, God asks Isaiah to go naked and barefoot for three years (v. 2).
 - (1) Isaiah stops wearing his outer garment and sandals, but he is not stark naked. He still wears a loin cloth.⁶ Keep in mind Isaiah is a Judean aristocrat.
 - (2) God sometimes asked his prophets to engage in strange, symbolic actions to communicate a message (i.e., Jeremiah, Ezekiel). The symbolic actions were bound to be misunderstood. Rarely would they have been welcomed.
 - (a) "In a culture which makes well-balanced behavior a fetish (except in regard to sporting events), the prophets would not be welcomed. We are ill at ease in the presence of fanatics, people who are wholly committed to an idea, a program, or even another person. Our ideal is coolness, a noncommittal reserve which prevents us from belonging to anything but ourselves or to attachments we

¹ J. N. Oswalt, *NICOT*, 1:382.

² V. Buksbazen, *Isaiah*, 220.

³ J. N. Oswalt, *NICOT*, 383.

⁴ V. Buksbazen, *Isaiah*, 220.

⁵ J. N. Oswalt, *NICOT*, 383.

⁶ J. A. Martin, *BKC*, 1:1067.

have defined. In truth, this has always been humanity's ideal, and it is one the prophets reject heartily."⁷

- (3) If God asks you to do something “uncool” for him, would you? Street preaching on George Street would be an action similar today.

3. Naked Egyptians (Is 20:3-4).

- a. **Is 20:3-6** 3 Then Yahweh said, As my servant Isaiah has walked naked and barefoot for three years as a sign and a portent against Egypt and Cush, 4 so 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. 5 Then they shall be dismayed and ashamed because of Cush their hope and of Egypt their boast. 6 And 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?
- b. After three years, God explains Isaiah's nakedness (v. 3).
(1) Probably God's explanation was given as Isaiah began his three years of nakedness.
- c. Assyria will exile the Egyptians and Cushites naked and barefoot (v. 4).
(1) In the ancient world, exiles were often stripped naked when led into captivity.
(2) Ashurbanipal, a later Assyrian king, conquered Egypt and Cush around 667 bc.
- d. The nations, including Judah, who trust in Egypt will be ashamed of their trust (v. 5).
- e. The nations cannot escape God's judgment through Assyria (v. 6).

⁷ J. N. Oswalt, *NICOT*, 1:135.