

ISAIAH 20

A KING WHO NEVER EXISTED?

As the King of nations, the Lord God here predicts a sore calamity upon Egypt and Ethiopia; but as the King of saints, He brings good to His people out of it. This prophecy was delivered in the year that Ashdod, a strong city of the Philistines, was besieged and taken by an army of the Assyrians. It is uncertain exactly what year that was, but it was certainly within the reign of King Hezekiah of Judah (727-698 BC). King Sargon became master of Assyria in 722 BC; and it was actually he who – in that same year – completed the final destruction of Samaria in the Northern Kingdom of Israel, which Shalmaneser had initiated. Biblical skeptics formerly questioned the reality of Sargon's existence, since the only mention of him in history was this solitary Scripture passage. However, that changed in the year 1843, when Paul Emil Botta unearthed Sargon's magnificent palace at Khorsabad. This grand palace boasted 240 rooms and colossal human-headed winged bulls, each weighing in at a staggering 10 tons (9,072 kg) and towering at a height of 15 feet (4.8 m). Adorning the palace walls were magnificent slabs of stone, intricately carved with illustrations and inscriptions in cuneiform script. Needless to say, Sargon's existence is no longer doubted today.

The Lord told Isaiah to accompany this particular prophecy with a visible sign whenever he went out and about in public, for three years! He had been a sign to his own people of the melancholy times which had come and were coming, by the uncomfortable sackcloth which he wore. But Isaiah now had orders given him to take off his sackcloth; not to exchange it for better clothing, but for none at all – that is to say, he was to wear no outer garment such as a mantle, cloak, or coat; so that in comparison with the dress of others, and with what he himself usually wore, he would be considered naked. He was also told to put off his shoes and go barefoot. This was a great hardship upon the prophet; it was a blemish to his reputation, and it would expose him to contempt and ridicule. But God told him to do it, so that he might give a proof of his obedience to the Lord in a most difficult command, and also so that he might shame the disobedience of his people to the most easy and reasonable precepts.

So what was this sign intended to represent? It was intended to signify that the Egyptians and the Ethiopians would be led away into captivity by the king of Assyria – thus dressed in rags or scanty clothing, as Isaiah now was. The prophet walked about in this manner, as a sign and wonder, for three years; and this was a token of that which would be done three years afterwards, or possibly

Outline of the chapter:

- ❖ *Isaiah walks about without outer garments and shoes, as a sign of the carrying away of the Egyptians and Ethiopians by Assyria - verses 1, 2*
- ❖ *The explanation of the sign, with application to Egypt and Ethiopia - verses 3-5*
- ❖ *The explanation of the sign, with application to other nations, especially Judah - verse 6*

that which would be three years in the doing. The Assyrian army would campaign against the Ethiopians and Egyptians, and carry them away as captives in the barbarous manner here described (verse 4) – not just the soldiers taken in the field of battle; but even all the inhabitants, young and old. It would be a very piteous sight, and it would certainly move compassion in anyone who had the least degree of tenderness left in them.

But this prophecy was applicable to other nations as well; for all who had any dependence upon Egypt and Ethiopia would now be ashamed of them, and afraid of having anything to do with them. In those times, countries that were in danger of being overrun by the Assyrians expected and hoped that King Tirhakah of Ethiopia would use his numerous forces to put a stop to the Assyrians' victorious progress. And with even more assurance, they gloried in the thought that Egypt – a kingdom so famous for policy and prowess – would force Assyria to lift the siege of Ashdod and go home. But instead of this, by attempting to oppose the king of Assyria, Egypt and Ethiopia were only exposing themselves and making their countries a prey to him. Hereupon, all around them would be ashamed that they had ever promised themselves any advantage from such weak and cowardly nations, and they would be even more afraid than ever of the growing greatness of the Assyrian king. Those who put their expectation and glory in anything or anyone other than God will sooner or later be ashamed of it, and their disappointment in it will only increase their fear.

The Jews, in particular, would be convinced of their folly in resting upon such broken reeds as Egypt and Ethiopia; and so they would despair of any relief from them (verse 6). The inhabitants of “this isle” – that is, the land of Judah, which was situated upon the sea – would say, “Behold, such is our expectation – so vain, and so foolish. And this is what it will come to. We have fled for help to the Egyptians and Ethiopians, and we have hoped to be delivered by them from the king of Assyria; but now that *they* are broken thus, how shall we escape? We are not even able to bring such armies into the field as they did!” Vain indeed is the help of man! In vain is salvation hoped for from the hills and mountains (Jer. 3:23). But disappointment in earthly persons and things – instead of driving us to despair (such as, “How shall we escape?”) – should drive us to our Lord Jesus; for if we flee to Him for help, our expectations shall not be frustrated! Where else shall we look for help in the hour of necessity, except to “the Lord our righteousness”?

O Lord! You are the One in Whom we can place all our trust, for we know for sure that we shall never be disappointed by having You as our help in the hour of our difficulty. Amen.

