

## EXPOSITION OF ISAIAH

Message #28

Isaiah 20:1-6

Just this week the Prime Minister of Israel, Benjamin Netanyahu, had his first meeting in Washington with the newest President of the United States. The whole point of the meeting was to try to come up with a plan that can stabilize the political situation in the Middle East. Israel has always viewed the United States as her friend and I believe we are a blessed nation because we have been her friend.

**But what Mr. Netanyahu needs to realize, what all Israel needs to realize, is that the One she needs to really turn to for help, is the God who brought her into that Promised Land in the first place.** This is the same God who parted the Red Sea for her, the God who made the walls of Jericho fall down, the God who sent His Son and raised Him from the dead. This is the God Israel needs to turn to for help, because as far as I can see, no one in high political office of the United States has any clue about God, their land and their King.

We come now to one of the oddest chapters in the book of Isaiah. It is a chapter that features Isaiah walking through the land for three years without clothes and shoes to physically demonstrate what would literally happen to some of the Egyptians and some of the Ethiopians.

Some from Judah wanted to form alliances with the Egyptians and the Ethiopians in an attempt to deliver themselves from the Assyrians. Rather than turn to the Lord their God for help, they were trying to negotiate protection deals with other nations in an attempt to handle things themselves. So God gave this dramatic physical illustration by using His own prophet, Isaiah.

Tim Kelly said, concerning this text, that he was sure glad that we live in the Grace Age and not the O.T. economy, because the thought of our Pastor going naked and barefoot for three years as an assignment from God is something he didn't want to even start to visualize in his mind. But I'll have you know I have been doing a little work on the treadmill, just in case God makes a dispensational exemption for Kalamazoo or Michigan.

What is actually not funny about any of this, what is actually so sad is that if this were to happen, in Judah, Michigan or Kalamazoo, the people still would not get the illustration. You can tell people they need to turn to God and trust God and it falls for the most part on deaf ears.

Actually there is a powerful point God is communicating to Israel and to us by this bizarre illustration. The point of the chapter is this:

**IN THE END, GOD WILL STRIP BARE ISRAEL'S TRUST IN ANYTHING OTHER THAN HIM.**

In the end, God will eventually show His people how foolish it is to trust in anything but Him. God wants His people trusting and depending on Him. Any other dependency has no value or substance.

Egypt would not be able to get Israel out of her problems and neither would Ethiopia. Both powers would be completely humiliated and Isaiah would be used as an object lesson to prove it. **What is so sad is that God has to literally break things down to totally humiliating levels before His own people begin to acknowledge this truth.**

God often has to break people down in order to get them to turn to Him. Sometimes He must humiliate them and let them get into shameful and disgraceful situations so His people will finally learn their lessons. That is precisely what happens here.

Now certain key observations we want to make:

**(Observation #1)** - Isaiah was to do this literally, which proves prophecy is literal.

**(Observation #2)** - Isaiah was to do this temporally, which means humiliation is time limited.

**(Observation #3)** - Isaiah was to do this prophetically, which means prophecy is futuristic.

Now the text breaks down into five key segments:

**SEGMENT #1** – God reveals when this event occurred. **20:1**

It is quickly apparent that things surrounding this odd chapter are things connected to the city of Ashdod. Ashdod was one of five key strongly fortified Philistine cities that featured its own king (I Samuel 6:16-17). We learn from Joshua that this city was located near Gaza and that he fought against it and had great success, but some of the Philistines remained in the land (Joshua 11:22). We learn from Samuel that when the Philistines took the ark, they took it to Ashdod and put it in their idolatrous temple built to Dagon (I Samuel 5:1-7).

Uzziah, had fought against the Philistines and actually had torn down one of the walls of Ashdod and built cities in the area and Israelis lived among the Philistines (II Chronicles 26:6). We know from Nehemiah's account that some of the Jews actually married some of the Philistine women of Ashdod and that the children spoke both Hebrew and the Philistine language (Nehemiah 13:23-24).

**Here is the only place in the Bible where Sargon is mentioned.** In all reality, even though he is a pagan world leader, he is still nothing more than a puppet in the sovereign hands of a sovereign God. Sargon was probably the king of Assyria between the reigns of Shalmaneser and Sennacherib. He sent one of his commanders to capture Ashdod, which at the time was a key Philistine city. According to II Kings 18:17, the military leader's name sent by Sargon was "Tartan."

Now Israel had come to believe that she had a solid friend and ally in Ashdod. They lived together, they had married one another and she actually felt that she could rely on these Philistines to help defend them against the Assyrian threat. God was about to show them that their faith was in the wrong thing.

Somewhere around 713 B.C., the Philistines revolted against Assyria and Sargon ordered Tartan to siege Ashdod. Assyria went to Ashdod, fought against it and captured it in 711 B.C. In one moment of time, everything that many of the Israelites trusted in was gone. People today may trust in a country to protect them or they may trust in a company to provide for them or they may trust in a career to secure their future. It can all be gone in one moment of time. God has never wanted His people trusting in some temporal power or leader or thing, He has always wanted His people to trust in Him.

**SEGMENT #2** – God reveals His Word and will to His people through His prophet. **20:2a**

God came to Isaiah now that Ashdod was captured and He said I am going to use you as an object lesson to reveal to My people, My Word. This is a key point to realize. Isaiah did not get up one morning and say I think I'll do something weird; he was a key prophet of God and God directly spoke to him. The gift of a prophet, who receives direct messages from God, is gone. But there is an application we may make.

God still speaks through His chosen and gifted men whom He calls, through His written Word. This is true in the O.T. economy and also true in the N.T. economy. God speaks through His gifted men who can unravel His written Word. As a truly gifted man of God sets forth accurately the Word of God, God's Word and will are revealed and God speaks to His people.

**SEGMENT #3** – God gives a visual prophetic illustration of what will happen. **20:2b-3**

God gives Isaiah a very strange assignment. God told Isaiah to take the sackcloth from his hips and take his shoes off his feet and go naked and barefoot for three years as a sign and token to His people against trusting in Egypt or Ethiopia. For three years Isaiah did not wear his normal clothes or his sandals. **By virtue of the fact that the LORD spoke “through” Isaiah, it is evident that Isaiah was communicating exactly what this was all about to the people of God.**

Now I believe there is a very clear Tribulation prophetic point that is made here. When the Tribulation begins, the Antichrist will enter into a peace treaty with Israel, and for three years Israel will believe that he and his allies are the ones in whom they can trust. However, that will all change quickly. Because in just a little over three years into the Tribulation, Israel will realize that she has no ally but God.

There is a debate among Bible interpreters as to whether or not Isaiah was completely naked. Some take the position that he took off his outer garment and was naked in the sense that he may have had a somewhat covered body, and semi-naked body and others believe he was completely naked.

When Dr. Gesenius tracked the Hebrew word used for “naked” he concluded that it can refer either to one totally naked or one that is poorly clad (William Gesenius, *Hebrew Lexicon*, p. 653). In other words, he believes that it may refer to partial nudity rather than total nudity. Those who believe the partial nudity positions suggest that the purpose is to prove a social prophetic point, not a moral prophetic point.

However, when we actually examine all the passages where this word is used, it seems to me that you cannot necessarily conclude or prove that this is not referring to total nakedness. For example in Job 1:21, it is referring to total nakedness. Other references are - Job 22:6; 24:7, 10; Isaiah 58:7; I Samuel 19:24; Isaiah 20:2.

**But regardless, Isaiah's job assignment from God was to walk through Israel without clothes, drawing startling attention to the fact and communicating the fact that he is illustrating what was going to happen to the powers in which Israel trusted.**

God's point to Israel was this - what you are trusting in, Egypt and Ethiopia, will both be stripped bare and will be totally humiliated and taken captive. They are not able to protect you and provide for you and you need to turn to your God, the only One in whom you may rely.

It is idolatrous and immoral for a believer to trust in something other than God.

**SEGMENT #4 – God will literally fulfill His prophetic Word. 20:4**

The adverb “so” that begins **verse 4** is a word that gives us a comparative analogy. In other words there is a comparative analogy between what Isaiah was doing and what would prophetically happen to the Egyptians and Ethiopians. Many of the Egyptians and Ethiopians would be totally humiliated and taken captive in a shameful and disgraceful way and Isaiah was illustrating this. They would be taken by the King of Assyria and exiled and paraded through the land without any clothes, both young and old. William Kelly said history is silent on this, but we know prophecy isn't. I believe there is a Tribulation application to this prophecy. In Revelation 16:15, there is a reference to lack of clothing in regard to Armageddon.

God wanted His people to realize that Isaiah was faithfully obeying His Word in allowing himself to be humiliated as a symbolic action of what would happen to two powers on which Israel was depending.

When you depend on something other than God, your whole world is shattered when that which you depended on is gone. Years ago I lived next door to a man who had worked at a steel mill in south Chicago for 30 years. One day he was called into the office and informed they were making cuts and he was done. He sat on my porch in Indiana and wept. He said I always believed that this company would care about me and take care of me and it hurts to know it doesn't. His world was shattered because his dependency had been on a company, not God.

But when one trusts in God, even though when this kind of thing happens, there is hurt but there is also hope. Because God's people realize it is God who is looking out for them and if He closes one door, He'll open another door. Israel has still not learned this lesson.

**SEGMENT #5 – God's fulfilled Word will eventually have an impact on His people. 20:5-6**

Dr. Edward Young made an interesting observation when he said notice that “it is Isaiah, not the Assyrians, who announces this prediction” (*Isaiah*, Vol. 2, p. 57). Even though the Assyrians would carry out the assignment, it still is God's sovereign assignment and His assignment is being announced by His prophet.

There are four main reactions that Israel will eventually have to the fact that they did not depend on God:

**(Reaction #1)** - When God shows His people that they are trusting in the wrong thing,  
His people become dismayed . **20:5a**

The word “dismayed” means there will come a day when God’s people will be completely alarmed, timid and even fearful and discouraged of the fact that they trusted in something other than God (William Gesenius, *Hebrew Lexicon*, p. 314).

**(Reaction #2)** - When God shows His people that they are trusting in the wrong thing,  
His people become ashamed . **20:5b**

The word “ashamed” means there is coming a day when God’s people will view themselves in a vile and shameful way because they did not trust in God (Ibid., p. 147). There will be a total embarrassment and humiliation for the failure to trust God (William D. Mounce, *Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, p. 40).

**(Reaction #3)** - When God shows His people that they are trusting in the wrong thing,  
His people acknowledge their false hope. **20:5c**

**If you trust in anything but God to save you, you are trusting in the wrong thing.**

There will come a day when all of God’s people will acknowledge this reality. Israel would realize that their confidence in Egypt and Ethiopia was wrong. Neither nation could save them; only God could save them.

**(Reaction #4)** - When God shows His people that they are trusting in the wrong thing,  
His people still do not understand . **20:6**

Look at how pathetic **verse 6** is. God has His prophet walk naked in the land for three years illustrating and communicating the fact that they need to realize what they are trusting in will not cut it and they still do not get it. Instead of them turning to the Lord and trusting God, they are asking “how shall we escape?” You have God’s prophet proclaiming and illustrating God’s Word on this very subject, and the people will not listen. They refuse to trust God.

If you are a believer, you need to clearly see what this text is saying. When you are threatened and intimidated, turn to the Lord. God wants His people turning to Him and trusting Him. If you lose your job, turn to the Lord and ask Him to lead you to another job. If you lose your health, turn to the Lord and ask Him to help you regain your health. If you lose a relationship, turn to the Lord and ask Him to give you a new relationship. When you trust in God and turn to God, you are doing exactly what God wants you to do.

This text also warns against the heresy of Arminian theology. This text warns against trusting in anything for salvation other than Jesus Christ. You will not be able to deliver yourself from your sins and from God’s wrath. You will not be able to turn to a religion or church to help you out of your sin guilt. There is only One Person who can save you and deliver you and that is Jesus Christ. If you trust in anything other than Him, one day you will be totally humiliated and ashamed, but if you will turn to Him and trust Him, you shall be saved.