

Isaiah 20

This chapter explains in more detail the previous prophecies relating to Ethiopia (Isaiah 18) and Egypt (Isaiah 19). *Is. 20:1 In the year that the commander came to Ashdod, when Sargon the king of Assyria sent him and he fought against Ashdod and captured it,*

The word "*commander*" can be interpreted "*Tartan*" (also read 2 Kings 18:17); therefore, *Tartan* points to the chief *commander* of the Assyria army and not the name of an individual. This *commander came* against *Ashdod*, *Ashdod* being one of the five major cities of the Philistines. He was *sent* by *Sargon II*, king of Assyria, who reigned from 722 to 705 BC. It wasn't until the Assyrians *captured...Ashdod* in 711 BC that they could set their sights on Egypt and Ethiopia (Egypt and Ethiopia had been in an alliance with the Philistines). Therefore, when *Ashdod* fell, the stage was set for God to begin to fulfill a portion of Isaiah's previous prophecies relating to Egypt and Ethiopia.

Is. 20:2 at that time the Lord spoke through Isaiah the son of Amoz, saying, "Go and loosen the sackcloth from your hips, and take your shoes off your feet." And he did so, going naked and barefoot.

In 711 BC, the year that Ashdod fell, *Isaiah* was told to go *naked and barefoot*. To go *naked* meant to be clad only with a loin cloth.

Is. 20:3 And the Lord said, "Even as My servant Isaiah has gone naked and barefoot three years as a sign and token against Egypt and Cush,

Isaiah went naked and barefoot three years as a sign and token against Egypt and Cush (Ethiopia). This meant that within *three years* from the time that *Isaiah* was instructed to go *naked and barefoot*, the prophecies of chapters 18 and 19 concerning the captivity of *Cush* (Ethiopia) and *Egypt* would begin to be fulfilled.

Is. 20:4 so the king of Assyria will lead away the captives of Egypt and the exiles of Cush, young and old, naked and barefoot with buttocks uncovered, to the shame of Egypt.

Assyria would lead...the captivities of Egypt and the exiles of Cush (Ethiopia) out of their homeland *naked and barefoot*.

The MacMillan Bible Atlas records the following concerning this event:

In 713-712 BC, the Assyrians had to put down additional rebellions in Ashdod. The revolt of 712 BC was supported by the Ethiopian pharaoh Shabaku, founder of the twenty-fifth dynasty in Egypt (Isaiah 20). According to Sargon's inscriptions, Judah, Edom, and Moab were also involved in the revolt, though they surrendered—evidently quickly, and most of the Assyrian wrath was vent upon Ashdod. Sargon also conquered Gibbethon, Ekron, and Gath.

Ashdod, too, became an Assyrian province. The borders of the Assyrian empire now spread to the brook of Egypt. In this period there was little hope for the continued existence of Judah as an independent kingdom.

Fausset's Bible Dictionary has this to say concerning Sargon II of Assyria:

Then, according to the inscriptions, he invaded Egypt and Ethiopia, and received tribute from a Pharaoh of Egypt..., confirming Isaiah 20:2-4, “as 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 and the Ethiopians captives, young and old, naked and barefoot,” etc. The monuments also represent Egypt at this time in that close connection with Ethiopia which the prophet implies.

Is. 20:5 “Then they shall be dismayed and ashamed because of Cush their hope and Egypt their boast.

Judah, whose king was Hezekiah, would *be dismayed and ashamed because* they had trusted the Egyptians and Ethiopians to help deliver them from the Assyrians. Note: The fact that Hezekiah and Judah placed trust in Egypt and Ethiopia is obvious from the events described in 2Kings 18:21 and 24, events that occurred, not during the reign of Sargon II of Assyria, but later during the reign of Sennacherib, his successor.

Is. 20:6 “So the inhabitants of this coastland will say in that day, ‘Behold, such is our hope, where we fled for help to be delivered from the king of Assyria; and we, how shall we escape?’”

God made it very clear that the Egyptians and Ethiopians were incapable of protecting Judah. Jehovah alone, obviously, was capable of doing so. Note: It was subsequent to this event that King Hezekiah began to trust God rather than other nations for the protection he so desperately needed. Therefore, later, during the reign of *Sennacherib of Assyria*, Hezekiah stands firm, and God sees to it that the Assyrians are defeated (Isaiah 36 and 37).

Isaiah 21

Isaiah deals with Babylon, Edom, and Arabia in this chapter.

In chapters 13 and 14, Isaiah dealt with events that will transpire in *Babylon* during the Tribulation. In verses 1-10 of Isaiah 21, he prophesies of the overthrow of the Babylon of his day at the hands of the Medes and the Persians (which occurred in 538 BC—around 150 years after Isaiah's prophetic ministry had ended). He expands this thought later, the overthrow of the Babylon of his day by the Persians, in Isaiah 43-48.

Is. 21:1 The oracle concerning the wilderness of the sea. As windstorms in the Negev sweep on, It comes from the wilderness, from a terrifying land.

The phrase, “*concerning the wilderness,*” points to Babylon, as is confirmed by Revelation 17:3. “*The sea*” (*many waters*) is also associated with Babylon in verses such as Jeremiah 51:13 and Revelation 17:1 (Babylon was located along the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers).

Is. 21:2 A harsh vision has been shown to me; The treacherous one still deals treacherously, and the destroyer still destroys. Go up, Elam, lay siege, Media; I have made an end of all the groaning she has caused.

Babylon was filled with *treacherous* men who dealt *treacherously*; therefore, she would fall. Another reason she would fall was because *the destroyer still destroys*. Therefore, Babylon

would fall at the hands of the Medo-Persian Empire (who *destroys Babylon*); for *Elam* is Persia, and *Media* is the Medes.

Is. 21:3 For this reason my loins are full of anguish; Pains have seized me like the pains of a woman in labor. I am so bewildered I cannot hear, so terrified I cannot see.

Isaiah was filled with *anguish* and *Pains* (as that of a woman in labor) as God showed him this vision. He was so bewildered that he could no longer *hear* and so *terrified* that he could not *see*.

Is. 21:4 My mind reels, horror overwhelms me; The twilight I longed for has been turned for me into trembling.

Isaiah's *mind* reeled; he was overwhelmed with *horror*, and he trembled at what he saw. Evidently, Isaiah experienced something similar to a horrible nightmare.

Is. 21:5 They set the table, they spread out the cloth, they eat, they drink; "Rise up, captains, oil the shields,"

This makes reference to Belshazzar's *banquet* of Daniel 5, the *banquet* he prepared the very night the city of Babylon fell. Because the Babylonians were caught off guard by the surprise attack of the Medo-Persians, the first (and possibly the final) command heard in Babylon was "*oil the shields*," a standard practice before entering into battle. Note: A well oiled shield created a slick surface which helped protect a warrior from the enemy's weaponry.

Is. 21:6 For thus the Lord says to me, "Go, station the lookout, let him report what he sees.

A watchman was to serve as a *lookout* and *report* what he saw.

Is. 21:7 "When he sees riders, horsemen in pairs, A train of donkeys, a train of camels, Let him pay close attention, very close attention."

When the watchman saw a particular type of army, he was to pay *very close attention*. Notice that this army would ride *in pairs*—pointing to the Medo-Persian army, two armies attacking a common foe. Also note that *donkeys* and *camels* are mentioned. Cyrus used such animals in battle for the purpose of disorganizing the enemy. His well organized troops would follow and seize the bewildered opponent.

Is. 21:8 Then the lookout called, "O Lord, I stand continually by day on the watchtower, And I am stationed every night at my guard post.

The watchman had been observing continually; but after becoming impatient, he asked now long he was to continue his watch.

Is. 21:9 "Now behold, here comes a troop of riders, horsemen in pairs." And one answered and said, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon; And all the images of her gods are shattered on the ground."

As the watchman manned his post, he finally saw the Medo-Persian army, on the heels of which he was informed that *Babylon* and *her gods* had *fallen*. Obviously, the Medo-Persians were very clever as they overthrew *Babylon*; for the city was taken before the watchman saw the foe. Not only was *Babylon* overthrown; but *her gods* were overthrown as well, confirming once again that Jehovah is greater than any manmade god (fulfilling Jeremiah's words of Jeremiah 51:47 and 52 as well). Isaiah 40 and 41 also address this subject in much detail.

It is amazing that Isaiah spoke of *Cyrus*, the leader of the Persians, approximately 100 years before *Cyrus* was born (Isaiah 44:24-28 and Isaiah 45:1-7). It is amazing as well that Isaiah *Is. 21:10 O my threshed people, and my afflicted of the threshing floor! What I have heard from the Lord of hosts, The God of Israel, I make known to you.*

Isaiah serves as an encouragement to Judah by informing her that Babylon, who will later thresh Judah and Jerusalem as though she were on a *threshing floor* (in 586 BC under King Nebuchadnezzar—2 Kings 25:8-12), will eventually be judged by God. The means He will use to do so is the Medo-Persian Empire.

