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The Oracle Concerning Egypt and Ethiopia

20: 1-6

The oracle concerning Egypt and Ethiopia DIG: Sargon II destroyed Ashdod, a city in revolt against Assyria, in 711 BC. What object lesson was that meant to teach Judah? Nudity was culturally unacceptable: What was Isaiah likely wearing? How would that plus his message, take on new meaning when Assyria triumphs over Ashdod? How was Isra'el unequally yoked with Egypt and Ethiopia?

REFLECT: Do you learn better through lectures or object lessons? What object lesson has God provided for you that has contributed to your trusting God more? What is the "Assyria" that seems unstoppable in your life? What "Egypt" are you tempted to rely upon for help? What would it mean, instead, for you to trust God in that tempting situation? Are you unequally yoked in any way with the world?

This passage concludes **Isaiah's** oracle against **Egypt** and summarizes **God's** message not to trust in **her**. **Egypt** was under judgment so reliance on **her** was useless. Nevertheless, there were some in Judah who wanted to form an alliance with **Egypt** and **Cush**, or **Ethiopia**. As an example, **God** allows the Assyrian king Sargon II to capture the Philistine city of **Ahdod** in 711 BC. The king of **Ahdod**, Yamani, fled to **Egypt** to seek asylum. But **the Egyptians**, faced with an Assyrian army on its borders, completely capitulated and meekly handed over a bound Yamani to the Assyrians. This is the backdrop in **Isaiah**, prompted by **the Ruach Ha'Kodesh**, drew a line in the desert sand. The truth was that **Egypt** was just as subject to defeat as any other nation, and any reliance on **her** would be just as foolish as it had been for **Ahdod** and Yamani.

This oracle in **Isaiah Chapters 19** and **20** highlights the conflict between two world views: the biblical one and the world view. The temptation for the Jews of **Isaiah's** day to embrace **the world** was just as strong as it is for us today. The fears are the same. But **John** cuts to the heart of the issue when, under the inspiration of **the Holy Spirit**, **he** wrote: **Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world - the cravings of the sinful man, the lust of his eyes, and the boasting of what he has and does - comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but the man who**

does the will of God lives forever (First John 2:15-17). Today, the threat to the universal Church is *tolerance*. **The world** believes in syncretism, or that all paths lead to **God**. The motto of **the world** is, "All is one." But it was a lie at the Tower of Babel (see the commentary on **Genesis**, to see link [click D1 - The Tower of Babel](#)) it was a lie in **Isaiah's** lifetime, and it is a lie today. **The world** believes that we are all brothers and sisters. That is also a lie. There are only two families in this life. You are either in the family of **God** or the family of Satan. And if you aren't in one, you're in the other. That's what the Bible teaches.



Judah could not be protected from **the world** by embracing **the world** any more than we can today. **Isaiah's** remedy is our remedy. The Bible commands us to love **God** and **do not be yoked with unbelievers**. **For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial (or false gods)? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? What agreement is there between the Temple of God and idols? For we are the Temple of the living God. As ADONAI has said: I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be My people. Therefore, come out from them and be separate,** says the LORD (2 Corinthians 6:14-17).

In the year that the supreme commander, sent by Sargon king of Assyria, came to Ashdod and attacked and captured it (20:1). The year that **the supreme commander** went to **Ashdod** and captured it was during the reign of Sargon II (**Second Kings 18:17**). We know his reign lasted from 721 BC to 705 BC. The fall of **Ashdod** took place in 711 BC. It was necessary for **Ashdod** to be taken, because it stood in the way of **the Assyrian** invasion of both **Egypt** and **Ethiopia**. So with this one verse the fulfillment of three earlier prophecies begins.

It is in that year, 711 BC, that **Isaiah** is commanded to perform a symbolic act. **At that**

time, the LORD through Isaiah son of Amoz, He said to him, “Take off the sackcloth from your body and the sandals from your feet. And he did so, going around stripped and barefoot” (20:2). Being a prophet was not always an ideal situation. Sometimes you had to do some strange things. **Jeremiah** and **Ezeki’el** were asked to do some weird things as well. Here **Isaiah** is acting out the fate of captives, who were frequently stripped and led into captivity. **For three years Isaiah** did not wear **his** outer garment of **sackcloth**, an inner tunic, or **sandals**. **He** only wore a loincloth. It would be the equivalent of walking around in your underwear **for three years**. For most people this behavior would not be easy to undertake. But once **Isaiah** knew **God’s** will, **he** was committed to it. It is the same for us. **God** probably will not ask you to walk around for three years in your underwear, but **He** does ask for your obedience to **His** Word and **His** will. Indeed, **He** may ask *you* to do something that is just as distasteful as walking around in **his** underwear was to **Isaiah**.

Then the LORD said: Just as my servant Isaiah has gone stripped and barefoot for three years, as a sign and warning against Egypt and Cush, so the king of Assyria will lead away stripped and barefoot the Egyptian captives and Cushite exiles, young and old, with buttocks bared - to Egypt’s shame (20:3-4). The beginnings of **the near historical prophecies** of **Chapters 18 and 19** are about to be fulfilled. **Isaiah**, acting as a mouthpiece for **the LORD**, said that the way that **he** was **stripped** would be a **sign and warning against Egypt and Cush (Ethiopia)**. The concept of a **sign and warning** is very biblical (**Isaiah 8:18; Deuteronomy 13:1-2, 28:46, 29:3, 34:11; Psalms 135:9; Jeremiah 32:20-21**). Prior to the **Exodus**, the signs in **Egypt** proved that the Hebrews’ **God** was superior to any **Egyptian** god. Also, **Jesus’** resurrection was evidence that **He** was indeed who **He** said **He** was, **the Redeemer** and **Savior** of mankind (**Matthew 12:40**). So here **Isaiah’s** actions do not guarantee that **Egypt** will go into captivity, but they are part of the evidence that **Egypt** is not trustworthy and **ADONAI** is.

The Egyptians would be taken captive and **the Ethiopians** sent into exile, naked and disgraced (**Isaiah 3:17; Ezekiel 16:37, 23:10 and 29**). At first it seems odd that a revolt by **Ashdod** should provoke a prediction of **Egyptian** (and **Ethiopian**, since **the Ethiopian** dynasty ruled **Egypt**) captivity. Furthermore, such captivity did not occur until the reign of Esarhaddon in 671, some forty years later. However, further reflection shows that his emphasis was not so strange. In fact, it dealt with the real issue. For **Ashdod’s** fate was not the most important thing with which Judah should concern herself. The real issue was the fate of **Egypt**, the agitator of rebellion. So, **Isaiah** concerns **himself** with the cause of the rebellion, not the symptom. Not only will **Egypt’s** lackeys go into exile, **Isaiah** says, but so will **Egypt** herself. Mighty **Egypt**, rich in culture and glory, will be carried off in shame.⁶³

Those who trusted in Cush and boasted in Egypt will be afraid and put to shame. In that day the people who live on this coast will say: See what has happened to those we relied on, those we fled to for help and deliverance from the king of Assyria! How then can we escape (20:5-6)? Those in Judah, who thought an alliance with **Egypt and Ethiopia** would help her, would eventually **be afraid** and ashamed. People would realize that if **Egypt and Cush** had fallen to **Assyria**, then they had no chance of escape. As **Ashdod** had looked to **Egypt** and been betrayed, so would **they**. **She** had not been strong enough to save **Ashdod**. **She** had not even been strong enough to defy **Assyria's** demand for Yamani. All this pointed to the harsh truth that whatever **Assyria** wanted **she** would get. Why then, **Isaiah** would ask, would Judah want to trust **Egypt**? It could only end in shame as it did for Yamani. Why look to the fading glory of **Egypt** when she could look to the glory of **God**.⁶⁴ Why do we sometimes look to the fading glory of mere humans, when we could look to the glory of **ADONAI**?