

CHAPTER 20

INTRODUCTION TO ISAIAH 20

This chapter contains a prophecy of the destruction of the Egyptians and Ethiopians by the Assyrians, which had been prophesied of separately in the two preceding chapters (^{<2380>}Isaiah 18:1-19:25), and now conjunctly in this: the time of it is given, (^{<2301>}Isaiah 20:1) the sign of it, the prophet's walking naked, and barefoot, (^{<2302>}Isaiah 20:2) the explanation and accommodation of the sign to the captivity of Egypt and Ethiopia, (^{<2303>}Isaiah 20:3,4) the use of this to the Jews, and the effect it had upon them; shame for their trust and dependence on the above nations, and despair of deliverance from the Assyrians by their means, (^{<2305>}Isaiah 20:5,6).

Ver. 1. *In the year that Tartan came unto Ashdod, &c.]* Or Azotus, as the Septuagint here call it; and which is its name in the New Testament, (see Gill on "^{<4081>}Acts 8:40"). This Tartan, or whom the Septuagint names Tanathan, and the Arabic version Tathan, was one of Sennacherib's generals, (^{<1287>}2 Kings 18:17):

(when Sargon the king of Assyria sent him); to the above place to besiege it. This Sargon is generally thought to be the same with Sennacherib, since Tartan was one of his generals, who might have more names than one. Jerom says he had seven; the Jewish Rabbins^{f398} eight; though some think a predecessor of his is meant, Shalmaneser; and others his son Esarhaddon, who in the Apocrypha

“And there passed not five and fifty days, before two of his sons killed him, and they fled into the mountains of Ararath; and Sarchedonus his son reigned in his stead; who appointed over his father's accounts, and over all his affairs, Achiacharus my brother Anael's son.” (Tobit 1:21)

is called Sarchedon, which might easily pass by pronunciation into Sargon:

and fought against Ashdod, and took it; which was held by the Assyrians till the time of Psammiticus, and was so strong a city, and so well fortified,

that it held out a siege of twenty nine years before he could be master of it^{f399}; how long Tartan lay against it, before he took it, is not said; nor is it certain what year he came against it; those who take Sargon to be Shalmaneser place it in the fourth year of Hezekiah's reign, who sent Tartan to Ashdod at the same time that he went against Samaria, (^{<128B>}2 Kings 18:9) but others, who think Sennacherib is Sargon, fix it to the fourteenth year of Hezekiah's reign, as Kimchi; who, hearing of Tirhakah king of Ethiopia and Egypt coming against him, went forth to meet him, and subdued him; and at the same time sent Tartan against Ashdod; or rather this was done when he took the fenced cities of Judah, of which this was one, having been taken a little before by Hezekiah from the Philistines; (see ^{<128B>}2 Kings 18:8,13) though, if Esarhaddon is Sargon, this must be in the times of Manasseh, perhaps about the twenty second year of his reign, by whom he was taken, and carried captive; but it is most likely to have been in Hezekiah's time.

Ver. 2. *At the same time spake the Lord by Isaiah the son of Amoz, &c.]*

Or, "by the hand of Isaiah", by his means; and it was to him likewise, as the following words show; and so the Septuagint version renders it; he spoke by him, by the sign he used, according to his order, and he spoke to him to use the sign:

saying; so the Arabic version, "with him"; and with these versions Noldius agrees:

go, and loose the sackcloth from off thy loins; a token of mourning, and which the prophet wore, as Kimchi thinks, because of the captivity of the ten tribes; and it may be also on account of the miseries that were coming upon the people of the Jews; though some think this was his common garb, and the same with the royal garment the prophets used to wear, (^{<380B>}Zechariah 13:4) but that he had put off, and had put on sackcloth in its room, which he is now bid to take off:

and put off thy shoe from thy foot; as a sign of distress and mourning also, (^{<105D>}2 Samuel 15:30):

and he did so, walking naked and barefoot; Kimchi thinks this was only visionally, or in the vision of prophecy, as he calls it, and not in reality; but the latter seems most probable, and best to agree with what follows; for he was obedient to the divine command, not regarding the disgrace which might attend it, nor the danger of catching cold, to which he was exposed;

and hence he has the character of a servant of the Lord, in the next words, and a faithful obedient one he was.

Ver. 3. *And the Lord said, &c.*] Here follows the explanation of the sign, and the accommodation of it to the thing signified by it:

like as my servant Isaiah hath walked naked and barefoot; not wholly naked, for that would have been very indecent and dangerous indeed; but without his upper garment, as Saul, (~~1~~¹ Samuel 19:24) and David, (~~2~~² Samuel 6:14,20) or with rent and ragged clothes, and old shoes, as Jarchi^{f400} interprets it, and which might be only when he appeared abroad; and how long he thus walked is not certain, whether only one day, as some, or three days, as others, or three years, which is not said, though our version inclines to it; but the three years next mentioned are not to be joined to Isaiah's walking, but to the thing signified by it; for the accent "athnach" is at the word which is rendered "barefoot", and distinguishes this clause from the following. The Septuagint indeed puts the phrase "three years" into both clauses, but it only belongs to the latter:

three years [for] a sign and wonder upon Egypt, and upon Ethiopia; that is, the prophet's walking naked and barefoot was a sign that three years after this Egypt and Ethiopia should be subdued by the Assyrians; or, that so long he should be in subduing them, or their calamities should last such a term of time. This sign was only seen by the Jews, for whose sake chiefly this prophecy was, to take off their dependence on the above nations; though probably this might be made known to the Egyptians and Ethiopians.

Ver. 4. *So shall the king of Assyria lead away the Egyptians prisoners, and the Ethiopians captives, &c.*] As beasts are led or driven, being taken prisoners, and carried captive by the king of Assyria, namely Sargon, whoever is intended by him:

young and old; without any regard to age, sparing none for their tender years or gray hairs:

naked and barefoot; as prisoners of war commonly are, being stripped by their conquerors of their clothes, and having only a few rags given them to cover their nakedness with, and obliged to travel without shoes on their feet:

even with [their] buttocks uncovered, to the shame of Egypt; having no clothes on them to cover those parts; or the skirts of their garments cut off, as David's servants were by the Ammonites, (~~2~~2 Samuel 10:4) and this to humble and mortify the pride of the Egyptians.

Ver. 5. *And they shall be afraid and ashamed*, &c.] That is, those that trusted and depended upon the Egyptians and Ethiopians, particularly the Jews after mentioned, shall be "afraid" that it will be their turn next, that they also shall be taken and carried captive; and they shall be "ashamed" that they have put their trust and confidence in those nations, and not in the Lord:

of Ethiopia their expectation; from whom they expected assistance and protection, particularly when Tirhakah king of Ethiopia went out against the king of Assyria, that he would have been a match for him, and have overcome him, and so have freed them from such a powerful enemy:

and of Egypt their glory; who was their ally, and a very potent one, and in whom they gloried; but now should be ashamed, when both those people on whom they relied were carried captive.

Ver. 6. *And the inhabitants of this isle shall say, in that day*, &c.] Not of Ashdod, (~~23~~Isaiah 20:1) or the isle of Caphtor, (~~24~~Jeremiah 47:4) but the land of Israel, as both Jarchi and Kimchi interpret it; so called, because it bordered on the sea, as such countries are sometimes called isles; (see ~~25~~Jeremiah 25:22 ~~26~~Ezekiel 27:3,15). Ben Melech interprets it of Jerusalem, and observes that the word signifies a place or country, whether it has a river or sea encompassing it, or not; besides, the land of Canaan had the Mediterranean sea on one side of it, and the sea of Galilee and Tiberias on the other, and was moreover separated from all other countries by the power, providence, and presence of God:

behold, such [is] our expectation, whither we flee for help, to be delivered from the king of Assyria; signifying that it was vain and foolish, and they had acted a very weak, as well as a wicked part, in having recourse to the Egyptians and Ethiopians to help them against the Assyrians, as it plainly appeared by both nations now being conquered by them:

and how shall we escape? seeing they had not, who were more powerful than they were; and how could they think that they could save them, who could not save themselves? and so the Targum,

“if they have not delivered their souls (themselves), how shall we be delivered?”