

**Title:** *“The Apologetics of the Captivity of Assyria”*

**Sub-Title:** *“Isaiah, the Undercover Captive”*

**Key Verse of Isaiah 9:6** “For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.”

**Key Verse of Apologetics: I Peter 3:15** “But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear:”

**Introduction:** A story, yes, maybe even a saga recorded here for us in Isaiah chapter twenty. In these six brief verses the struggle between the oppressed, Israel and the Ethiopians (also referred to as the Cushite), and their oppressors, Assyria. But why has God recorded this for us? What does He want us to learn from this biblical account? How does this apply to Christians, and unbelievers? What purpose was there for the prophet, Isaiah, to be shamed along with the other captives?

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First, Thomas Strouse briefly analyzed Isaiah chapter twenty this way, “Apparently in 711 BC, Sargon’s general Tartan defeated the Philistine City of Ashdod as a precursor to the defeat and humiliation of Egypt and Ethiopia (vv. 1-6). Since Isaiah was a sign and wonder in Israel (cf. Isiah 8:18), he enacted the role of a prisoner of war by his attire, or lack of it. The Lord instructed the prophet, and he obeyed, by removing his sackcloth and shoes, and walking about for three years naked and barefoot (vv. 2-4). His nakedness was probably stark, exposing his ‘buttocks.’”<sup>1</sup>

As before mentioned, Israel would appear to be a picture of humanity, and that picture is one in which all can learn from. It should be mentioned here that Israel is a Theocracy, where the Lord is the Head of this nation. And if the Jewish people are a picture of humanity, the believer could conclude that the by in large unbelief of the Jews in the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ, is an accurate picture of a vast majority of the World’s population.

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Strouse, Expository Notes on Isaiah, OT 513 (Cromwell, CT: Bible Baptist Theological Seminary, date unknown) 16.

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Another conclusion that Christians could reasonably conclude is the continual persecution of the Jewish people from their inception is very likely the loving chastisement from the Lord. Make no mistake, the Jews must receive Jesus Christ as their personal Saviour in order for them to be saved and have an eternal home in heaven. (Romans 1:16 “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.”)

The Christian should also see the character of God by observing the special relationship between the Lord and the nation of Israel. One should consider the patience that God has with Israel. And God has demonstrated His patience with mankind. One should also see God's hand of protection on the nation of Israel. And maybe the most important, one must consider the divine purpose that God has for the nation of Israel. All these attributes are true in the life of the Christian. Now let's consider Isaiah chapter twenty.

**Text: Isaiah 20:1-6** “In the year that Tartan came unto Ashdod, (when Sargon the king of Assyria sent him,) and fought against Ashdod, and took it;

**Vs. 2** At the same time spake the LORD by Isaiah the son of Amoz, saying, Go and loose the sackcloth from off thy loins, and put off thy shoe from thy foot. And he did so, walking naked and barefoot.

**Vs. 3** And the LORD said, Like as my servant Isaiah hath walked naked and barefoot three years for a sign and wonder upon Egypt and upon Ethiopia;

**Vs. 4** So shall the king of Assyria lead away the Egyptians prisoners, and the Ethiopians captives, young and old, naked and barefoot, even with their buttocks uncovered, to the shame of Egypt.

**Vs. 5** And they shall be afraid and ashamed of Ethiopia their expectation, and of Egypt their glory.

**Vs. 6** And the inhabitant of this isle shall say in that day, Behold, such is our expectation, whither we flee for help to be delivered from the king of Assyria: and how shall we escape?”

**Analysis of this passage:** The first aspect of this Old Testament, prophetic account is the sovereignty of God in the affairs of mankind. Remembering that Christ is the focal point of the book of Isaiah, as well as the other sixty-five books of the Bible, and humanly speaking, Isaiah the prophet is the focus of this account.

- The first lesson we can take away from this biblical account of capture of the Egyptians and the Ethiopians by their precursor, the Assyrians, is that there is a preacher putting himself in harm's way for the sake of others and obedience to the Lord.
  
- As this lesson is being written in late August 2019, Benjamin Netanyahu is on TV discussing how he is dealing with attacks or threats from Hamas. This fact alone should drive home how relevant the study of Isaiah is to everyone today.

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- The persecutor that was referenced in Isaiah chapter twenty was the Assyrians, and the king was Sargon. The city that they had attached was Ashdod, which is in the southern district of Israel near the Mediterranean Sea. The captives were Egyptians and Ethiopians. Because God wanted Isaiah to be a sign and a prophet to these captives, it would seem as that these captives were Old Testament believers in the Messiah.
  
- Isaiah posed as a captive alongside the Egyptians and the Ethiopians. This voluntary act of love for these people and obedience to the Lord preaches a powerful message.
  
- Isaiah seemed to take no regard for his personal safety or any shame that he endured for the spiritual wellbeing of those that were held captive.

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- This biblical event could certainly be considered a test of Isaiah's obedience to the Lord and his willingness to humble himself for the Lord and the people that he was a prophet to.
- Isaiah was able to be the prophet to the Egyptians and Ethiopians because of his obedience to the Lord and his humility. His posing as a captive put him in a spot where he could be used by the Lord.
- The end of chapter twenty seems to indicate that the Egyptians and the Ethiopians would eventually be freed, and that the Lord would eventually turn the tables on the king of Assyria.
- "In that day" is a reoccurring phrase throughout the book of Isaiah. The phrase, in the day of the Lord, is a reference to Christ ruling with an iron fist during the millennial reign.

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- As the Egyptians and Ethiopians had no way of escape, by their own means, from the king of Assyria. The question was posed by Isaiah, “and how shall we escape?”
- The answer to this question leads us back to our original statement that God is sovereign over the affairs of men. Captives may be freed from earthly kings, likely because of God’s intervening. But who is above God who will not be judged in the day of the Lord for their sins? The answer: No one!



1. **Apologetic argument one:** Belief or unbelief in the Lord Jesus Christ? This is the contrast made throughout Scripture, and throughout World history. This contrast is what we see in Isaiah chapter twenty. There are consequences for the believer and the unbeliever. There was a consequence for the captives in Israel and there will be a consequence for the World in the day of the Lord. What is the contrast for the day of the Lord? Trust in Christ and be saved, or deny Christ and be judged. The choice is yours.
  
2. **Apologetic argument two:** For the Christians the Jewish people are proof positive that God is sovereign, and intervenes in the affairs of men. “When Winston Churchill was asked why he believed in God, he simply responded, the Jewish people.”<sup>2</sup> The believer sees the hand of God in world history and is seen in everyday life. The most common example are answers to prayer.

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<sup>2</sup> Source unknown.

**3. Apologetic argument three:** The missionary heart is proof positive that man responds to God as He leads in their lives. Why did Isaiah strip naked and voluntarily join the ranks of prisoners for their faith in God? Why did Isaiah put himself in harm's way for the Egyptian and Ethiopian captives? There is no earthly reasoning for Isaiah to do what he did. Isaiah obeyed the voice of God. And the God of Isaiah is the same God who will answer your prayers when you pray, "*Here am I; send me*" Isa. 6:8.

**4. Apologetic argument four:** History sets a precedent for the present Christian life and the future. Therefore it is prudent that every skeptic tears down their façade and trust Christ as Saviour. For every believer should reorganize their life in such a way that Christ becomes ones first priority in their life. The Day of the Lord is near, and the time to serve the Lord is now...

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