

CRAWFORD BIBLE COMMENTARY

BIBLE STUDY

Isaiah Chapter 20 — A Sign Against Egypt and Cush

A Verse-by-Verse Bible Study from the Crawford Standard Bible

Introduction

Isaiah Chapter 20 is one of the shortest chapters in the book of Isaiah, but its message is powerful.

The chapter centers on a dramatic prophetic sign.

Isaiah is commanded to:

Remove his sackcloth.

Remove his sandals.

Walk barefoot and exposed.

And continue doing so for:

Three years.

This unusual action is not meaningless.

Isaiah becomes:

A living prophecy.

His appearance symbolizes the humiliation that will come upon:

Egypt.

Cush.

These nations had become objects of political trust.

People hoped:

Egypt could help.

Cush could help.

An alliance could protect them from:

Assyria.

But God shows that the very nations people are trusting for rescue will themselves be conquered and humiliated.

The central issue in Isaiah 20 is therefore not merely:

Egypt.

Cush.

Assyria.

It is:

Trust.

Where will God's people place their confidence?

In:

Political alliances?

Military strength?

Foreign nations?

Diplomacy?

Or:

The Lord?

Isaiah's prophetic sign gives the answer in the strongest possible way.

If Egypt and Cush cannot save themselves:

They cannot become ultimate saviors for others.

The chapter ends with a painful realization:

“See what has happened to those we looked to for help.”

And then comes the unavoidable question:

“How then can we escape?”

The answer is not stated directly in this short chapter, but Isaiah's larger message has already made it clear:

Escape is found not in:

Egypt.

Cush.

Assyria.

Human alliances.

But in:

The Lord.

The central truth of Isaiah 20 is:

God uses Isaiah's dramatic prophetic sign to expose the weakness of human alliances, warn that Egypt and Cush will themselves be humiliated by Assyria, and teach His people that no earthly power can provide the deliverance that belongs to the Lord alone.

I. ASSYRIA CAPTURES ASHDOD

Isaiah 20:1 — A Historical Crisis

“In the year that the commander of the army, sent by Sargon king of Assyria, came to Ashdod, fought against it, and captured it—”

The chapter begins with a historical event.

Assyria attacks:

Ashdod.

Ashdod was one of the important cities of:

Philistia.

The Assyrian king sends his military commander.

Ashdod is:

Attacked.

Captured.

This event demonstrates:

Assyria is advancing.

Its military power is real.

Nations throughout the region have reason to fear.

Cross References

2 Kings 18:17

The king of Assyria sent high-ranking military officials with a large army toward Jerusalem, showing how aggressively Assyria projected its power throughout the region.

Amos 1:8

God announces judgment against Philistine cities, including Ashdod, declaring that their rulers and remaining power will be cut off.

Zephaniah 2:4

The prophet announces that Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod, and Ekron will experience judgment and loss.

Spiritual Principle

Historical events can become warnings about where people are placing their confidence.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

When world events shift, the first question should not merely be:

“Who is strongest?”

But:

“Where is my trust?”

II. GOD COMMANDS ISAIAH TO BECOME A LIVING SIGN

Isaiah 20:2 — Sackcloth and Sandals Removed

“At that time the Lord spoke through Isaiah son of Amoz. He said, ‘Take off the sackcloth from your waist and the sandals from your feet.’ So Isaiah obeyed and walked around naked and barefoot.”

This was a dramatic prophetic command.

Isaiah had worn:

Sackcloth.

That often represented:

Mourning.

Prophetic grief.

Humility.

Now God tells him:

Remove it.

Remove the sandals.

Isaiah obeys.

The description of being “naked” in prophetic contexts can refer to being stripped down to minimal clothing rather than necessarily total nudity.

The point is:

Humiliation.

Exposure.

Captivity.

Isaiah's life becomes:

A message.

Cross References

Micah 1:8

Micah says he will mourn, lament, go barefoot, and strip himself in grief because of the coming judgment upon his people.

Ezekiel 4:4

God commanded Ezekiel to perform unusual physical actions as prophetic signs portraying the consequences of Israel's sin.

1 Kings 20:31

Servants of the defeated Syrian king put sackcloth around themselves as a sign of humiliation and submission while pleading for mercy.

Spiritual Principle

God sometimes teaches through actions as well as words.

Key Truth

Isaiah did not merely preach the prophecy.

He embodied it.

III. ISAIAH WALKS AS A SIGN FOR THREE YEARS

Isaiah 20:3 — A Long-Lasting Prophetic Warning

“Then the Lord said, ‘Just as My servant Isaiah has walked naked and barefoot for three years as a sign and a wonder against Egypt and Cush,’”

Three years is significant.

This is not:

A momentary illustration.

A one-day sermon.

A brief object lesson.

For three years:

Isaiah carries the message physically.

Every time people see him:

They are reminded.

Egypt will be humiliated.

Cush will be humiliated.

Do not trust them.

Cross References

Ezekiel 24:24

God says Ezekiel himself will become a sign to the people so that when the announced events happen, they will recognize the Lord's message.

Ezekiel 4:3

Ezekiel is commanded to perform a symbolic action that becomes a sign of coming judgment against Jerusalem.

Hosea 1:2

God used Hosea's personal life as part of a prophetic sign portraying Israel's spiritual unfaithfulness.

Spiritual Principle

God's warnings are often persistent because His mercy gives people time to listen.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

A repeated warning is evidence not merely of judgment, but also of patience.

IV. EGYPT AND CUSH WILL BE LED AWAY HUMILIATED

Isaiah 20:4 — Captivity and Shame

“So the king of Assyria will lead away the captives of Egypt and the exiles of Cush, young and old alike, stripped and barefoot, with their buttocks exposed—to the shame of Egypt.”

Isaiah's sign now becomes clear.

What Isaiah symbolized:

Captivity.

Humiliation.

Exposure.

Defeat.

Will happen to:

Egypt.

Cush.

The judgment affects:

Young.

Old.

No age group is exempt.

The great political powers people trusted are themselves unable to stand.

Cross References

Nahum 3:5

God warns a proud city that He will expose its shame publicly, revealing its disgrace before nations.

2 Kings 17:6

Assyria captured Samaria and carried Israel into exile, demonstrating its established practice of deporting conquered populations.

2 Chronicles 28:15

After captives had been humiliated and stripped, compassionate men clothed them, gave them sandals, fed them, and helped them return.

Spiritual Principle

The power people trust can itself become powerless.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Do not make a savior out of something that still needs saving.

V. THOSE WHO TRUSTED EGYPT AND CUSH WILL BE ASHAMED

Isaiah 20:5 — False Confidence Exposed

“Those who trusted in Cush and boasted in Egypt will be dismayed and put to shame.”

This is the spiritual heart of the chapter.

The problem is:

Trust.

People trusted:

Cush.

They boasted:

In Egypt.

They believed these nations could provide:

Protection.

Security.

Military assistance.

Deliverance.

God shows:

Their confidence was misplaced.

Cross References

Jeremiah 2:36

God rebukes His people for constantly changing political alliances and warns that Egypt will bring shame just as other foreign alliances had disappointed them.

Jeremiah 17:5

The person who places ultimate trust in human strength while turning the heart away from the Lord is under a curse because human power cannot replace God.

Isaiah 30:3

Judah's dependence upon Pharaoh and Egypt will become a source of shame and humiliation rather than true protection.

Spiritual Principle

What we boast in reveals what we trust.

Key Truth

Misplaced confidence eventually becomes disappointment.

VI. THE PEOPLE ASK, “HOW CAN WE ESCAPE?”

Isaiah 20:6 — The Failure of Human Rescue

“In that day the people of this coastland will say, ‘See what has happened to those we looked to for help, those we relied on for deliverance from the king of Assyria! How then can we escape?’”

The final verse brings the message home.

People look toward:

Egypt.

Cush.

And suddenly realize:

They cannot save us.

Why?

Because:

They cannot save themselves.

The question becomes:

“How then can we escape?”

This is where false trust leads.

First:

Confidence.

Then:

Disappointment.

Then:

Fear.

Cross References

Isaiah 30:2

Judah is rebuked for going down to Egypt seeking Pharaoh's protection without first consulting the Lord.

Jeremiah 37:7

God warns Judah that Egypt's army, which came out to help them against Babylon, would not provide lasting rescue because it would return to its own land.

Psalms 146:3

God's people are warned not to place ultimate trust in rulers or human beings because they do not possess the power to save.

Spiritual Principle

Human help can be useful.

It must never become ultimate.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

If your savior needs a savior, you have chosen the wrong savior.

VII. SIX GREAT LESSONS FROM ISAIAH 20

1. God Can Use Dramatic Signs

Isaiah becomes:

A living prophecy.

Principle:

God communicates truth in ways people cannot easily ignore.

2. God Warns Before Judgment

Isaiah walks as a sign for:

Three years.

Principle:

God's warnings reveal His patience.

3. Human Alliances Have Limits

Egypt and Cush appear powerful.

Yet:

They fall.

Principle:

Never turn temporary human strength into ultimate security.

4. False Trust Leads to Shame

Those who boasted in Egypt become:

Ashamed.

Principle:

Whatever replaces God as ultimate trust will eventually disappoint.

5. Powerful Nations Also Need Deliverance

Egypt and Cush cannot save themselves.

Principle:

No nation possesses independent saving power.

6. Salvation Belongs to the Lord

The chapter ends by exposing human helplessness.

Principle:

The failure of false saviors should turn our eyes toward the true Savior.

VIII. WHAT ISAIAH 20 TEACHES ABOUT PROPHETIC SIGNS

Isaiah does not merely:

Speak.

He acts.

His body becomes part of the message.

This happens elsewhere with:

Ezekiel.

Hosea.

Jeremiah.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

God sometimes makes the messenger's life part of the sermon.

IX. WHAT ISAIAH 20 TEACHES ABOUT OBEDIENCE

God gives Isaiah a difficult command.

Isaiah:

Obeys.

He does not negotiate.

He does not ask whether the sign will make him popular.

Spiritual Principle

Obedience is still obedience when the command is uncomfortable.

X. WHAT ISAIAH 20 TEACHES ABOUT TRUST

This is the chapter's dominant spiritual issue.

The people trusted:

Egypt.

Cush.

God wanted them trusting:

Him.

Key Truth

The question is not whether we trust.

Everyone trusts something.

The question is:

What?

XI. WHAT ISAIAH 20 TEACHES ABOUT POLITICAL ALLIANCES

Political agreements may have legitimate practical value.

But Isaiah warns against treating alliances as:

Ultimate security.

Judah was tempted to depend upon foreign power more than God.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Use human means wisely, but never worship human means.

XII. WHAT ISAIAH 20 TEACHES ABOUT EGYPT

Egypt repeatedly appears in Isaiah as:

A tempting refuge.

Judah sees:

Chariots.

Armies.

Strength.

God sees:

A limited nation.

Spiritual Principle

What looks powerful from ground level still appears small beneath God's throne.

XIII. WHAT ISAIAH 20 TEACHES ABOUT CUSH

Cush was also:

Strong.

Influential.

Respected.

But not:

Sovereign.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Reputation for strength does not equal the ability to deliver.

XIV. WHAT ISAIAH 20 TEACHES ABOUT ASSYRIA

Assyria is once again shown as:

A conquering power.

God permits Assyria to humble other nations.

Yet Isaiah has already taught:

Assyria itself remains under God's judgment.

Spiritual Principle

The instrument of judgment is never greater than the Judge.

XV. WHAT ISAIAH 20 TEACHES ABOUT HUMAN POWER

Egypt.

Cush.

Assyria.

Each appears powerful.

But all remain:

Temporary.

Limited.

Accountable.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Human powers rotate.

God remains.

XVI. WHAT ISAIAH 20 TEACHES ABOUT FALSE SECURITY

The people believe:

If Assyria comes:

Egypt will help.

Cush will help.

Then God says:

Watch what happens to Egypt and Cush.

Spiritual Principle

False security feels secure only until it is tested.

XVII. WHAT ISAIAH 20 TEACHES ABOUT SHAME

The word appears in relation to:

Egypt.

Those who trusted Egypt.

There is:

National shame.

Personal shame.

The failure of false trust becomes visible.

Key Truth

Trusting what cannot save eventually exposes the weakness of our confidence.

XVIII. WHAT ISAIAH 20 TEACHES ABOUT GOD'S WARNINGS

Three years is a long time to see Isaiah's sign.

God is saying:

Pay attention.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

When God repeats a warning, do not mistake repetition for irrelevance.

XIX. THE YEAR ASHDOD FELL

The prophecy is anchored in:

History.

A real military event.

A real king.

A real city.

Spiritual Principle

Biblical faith is not detached from history.

God works in real events.

XX. ISAIAH THE LIVING SERMON

Imagine seeing Isaiah repeatedly.

Barefoot.

Stripped of normal prophetic clothing.

Every appearance asks:

Why?

The answer:

Egypt.

Cush.

Captivity.

False trust.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Sometimes the most memorable sermon is the one people can see.

XXI. THREE YEARS OF WARNING

God could have used:

Three minutes.

He used:

Three years.

Why?

The warning needed to become unavoidable.

Spiritual Principle

God may warn repeatedly before allowing consequences to arrive.

XXII. THE HUMILIATION OF GREAT POWERS

Egypt and Cush are described as:

Captives.

Exiles.

Barefoot.

Exposed.

The contrast is intentional.

Before:

Powerful.

After:

Humiliated.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Human pride should remain humble because circumstances can reverse quickly.

XXIII. THE DANGER OF BOASTING IN EGYPT

The people did not merely:

Use Egypt.

They:

Boasted in Egypt.

The political alliance became:

Emotional confidence.

Spiritual dependence.

Spiritual Principle

A practical tool becomes an idol when confidence moves from God to the tool.

XXIV. THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN HELP AND HOPE

People may help us.

Governments may help us.

Friends may help us.

Doctors may help us.

Employers may help us.

But none should become:

Ultimate hope.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Receive human help gratefully while keeping divine trust exclusively with God.

XXV. “SEE WHAT HAS HAPPENED”

The people are forced to reconsider their assumptions.

They thought:

Egypt is strong.

Cush is secure.

Now:

Look.

Spiritual Principle

Sometimes God teaches us by allowing us to see the weakness of what we trusted.

XXVI. “HOW THEN CAN WE ESCAPE?”

This is the final question.

It is actually a good question when it leads toward:

God.

The failure of false deliverers creates the opportunity to seek:

The true Deliverer.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The collapse of false hope can become the beginning of true faith.

XXVII. HUMAN SAVIORS AND THE TRUE SAVIOR

The problem is not that all human assistance is wrong.

The problem is asking human assistance to perform:

God's role.

Spiritual Principle

Human beings can assist.

Only God can ultimately save.

XXVIII. EIGHT CONTRASTS IN ISAIAH 20

- 1. Powerful Nations → Captive Nations**
- 2. Confidence → Shame**
- 3. Boasting → Dismay**
- 4. Clothing → Exposure**
- 5. Diplomacy → Defeat**
- 6. Human Help → Human Helplessness**
- 7. False Security → Fear**
- 8. Earthly Deliverers → Need for the Lord**

Key Truth

Everything changes when what people trust proves unable to save.

XXIX. QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FOR PERSONAL STUDY

Question 1

What historical event begins Isaiah 20?

The Assyrian commander attacks and captures Ashdod.

Question 2

Who sent the Assyrian commander?

Sargon king of Assyria.

Question 3

What does God command Isaiah to remove?

His sackcloth and sandals.

Question 4

Why does Isaiah walk barefoot and exposed?

He becomes a prophetic sign of the humiliation coming upon Egypt and Cush.

Question 5

How long does Isaiah perform this sign?

Three years.

Question 6

What will happen to Egypt and Cush?

Their people will be taken away as captives and exiles by Assyria.

Question 7

Why is their humiliation important for Judah?

Judah and surrounding peoples were tempted to trust those nations for protection.

Question 8

What happens to those who trusted Cush?

They become dismayed.

Question 9

What happens to those who boasted in Egypt?

They are put to shame.

Question 10

What question do the coastland people ask?

“How then can we escape?”

Question 11

What does the chapter teach about human alliances?

They cannot provide ultimate security.

Question 12

What does the chapter teach about God's warnings?

God mercifully warns before consequences arrive.

Question 13

What does Isaiah's obedience teach?

God's servants must obey even when the assignment is difficult or personally uncomfortable.

Question 14

Who alone can provide ultimate deliverance?

The Lord.

XXX. PERSONAL APPLICATION

Isaiah 20 asks several searching questions.

What Am I Trusting?

If trouble comes, what is my first thought?

Money?

Connections?

Government?

People?

God?

Who Is My Egypt?

What person, institution, resource, or system have I mentally decided:

“I will be safe as long as I have this”?

Who Is My Cush?

Where have I placed confidence because something appears:

Strong?

Reliable?

Influential?

Am I Boasting in Human Help?

Have I moved from:

Gratitude.

To:

Dependence?

Do I Listen to God's Warnings?

Or do I require consequences before I take Him seriously?

Am I Willing to Obey When Obedience Is Uncomfortable?

Would I follow God if:

People misunderstand?

People stare?

People criticize?

What Happens to My Faith When Human Help Fails?

Do I panic?

Or turn more deeply toward God?

Can I Distinguish Between Help and Salvation?

Do I appreciate human help while still knowing:

Only God is my ultimate Deliverer?

XXXI. A CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“Never Trust a Deliverer Who Cannot Deliver Himself”

Egypt looked strong.

Cush looked powerful.

But both would become:

Captives.

Principle:

Place ultimate confidence only in the One who never needs rescue Himself.

XXXII. WHEN GOD MAKES THE MESSAGE VISIBLE

Isaiah's body becomes:

A visual sermon.

Every day:

The warning continues.

Spiritual Principle

God knows how to make truth memorable when people are reluctant to listen.

XXXIII. THE COST OF PROPHETIC OBEDIENCE

Isaiah's assignment involved:

Humility.

Exposure.

Embarrassment.

Persistence.

Three years.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

A faithful servant does not measure obedience by comfort.

XXXIV. GOD'S WARNING IS MERCY

The sign occurs:

Before.

The captivity.

That matters.

God warns first.

Spiritual Principle

A warning is an invitation to change direction before consequences arrive.

XXXV. POLITICAL TRUST VERSUS SPIRITUAL TRUST

Judah's temptation was:

Political.

But the underlying problem was:

Spiritual.

Their diplomacy revealed where the heart trusted.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Political decisions can become spiritual problems when practical alliances replace confidence in God.

XXXVI. WHEN STRONG NATIONS BECOME WEAK

Egypt and Cush become living examples.

Today's protector may become tomorrow's prisoner.

Spiritual Principle

Never build permanent confidence on changing power.

XXXVII. THE SHAME OF FALSE CONFIDENCE

Isaiah says people will be:

Dismayed.

Ashamed.

Why?

Because:

The thing they believed would save them fails publicly.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

False confidence eventually produces true disappointment.

XXXVIII. “THOSE WE LOOKED TO FOR HELP”

This phrase is revealing.

They looked:

Toward Egypt.

Toward Cush.

But not first toward:

God.

Spiritual Principle

Where the eyes turn first often reveals where the heart trusts most.

XXXIX. WHEN HUMAN HELP COLLAPSES

Sometimes God allows human supports to fail.

Not because:

All human help is evil.

But because:

It was carrying spiritual weight it was never designed to carry.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

God may remove a false crutch so we rediscover the strength of the Rock.

XL. HOW THEN CAN WE ESCAPE?

This question can lead toward:

Despair.

Or:

Faith.

If no human power can provide final rescue:

Look higher.

Spiritual Principle

Helplessness can become spiritually useful when it drives us toward God.

XLI. FIVE GREAT MOVEMENTS IN ISAIAH 20

1. Assyria Advances

Ashdod falls.

2. God Warns

Isaiah becomes a sign.

3. Egypt and Cush Fall

Their strength is exposed.

4. False Trust Collapses

Those who depended upon them are ashamed.

5. The Great Question Remains

“How then can we escape?”

Key Truth

When human saviors fail, God's people must rediscover that deliverance belongs to the Lord.

XLII. WHAT ISAIAH 20 SAYS TO BELIEVERS TODAY

Isaiah 20 does not teach:

Never accept help.

Never cooperate with people.

Never use practical resources.

It teaches:

Never turn them into God.

There is a difference between:

Using resources.

And:

Trusting resources ultimately.

There is a difference between:

Receiving help.

And:

Making the helper your savior.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Use the boat.

Trust the Lord of the sea.

XLIII. THE FAILURE OF FALSE SAVIORS

Every false savior eventually fails because every created thing is:

Limited.

Human.

Temporary.

Spiritual Principle

Only the eternal God can carry eternal trust.

XLIV. FINAL APPLICATION

Isaiah Chapter 20 is only six verses.

But its question reaches deeply into every human heart:

What are you trusting to save you?

Judah and the surrounding peoples saw:

Assyria.

They were afraid.

Then they looked toward:

Egypt.

Cush.

They thought:

Those nations are powerful.

They have resources.

They have armies.

They can protect us.

God responds by making Isaiah:

A living warning.

For three years:

He walks barefoot and exposed.

Every time someone sees him:

The message is the same.

Egypt will be humbled.

Cush will be humbled.

Do not place ultimate confidence there.

That message remains relevant.

Our “Egypt” may be:

Money.

Our “Cush” may be:

Influence.

It may be:

Government.

Retirement savings.

A job.

A doctor.

A family member.

A political alliance.

A military.

A denomination.

A ministry.

A friend.

Any of these may have legitimate value.

But none of them can become:

God.

None of them can guarantee:

Tomorrow.

Life.

Security.

Deliverance.

Isaiah teaches us:

Accept help.

But trust God.

Use resources.

But trust God.

Seek wise counsel.

But trust God.

Make plans.

But trust God.

Because every human resource has:

Limits.

The chapter ends:

“How then can we escape?”

That question sounds frightening until we remember:

Isaiah has been pointing toward the answer all along.

Not:

Egypt.

Not:

Cush.

Not:

Assyria.

The Lord.

The failure of earthly saviors is not meant merely to make us afraid.

It is meant to redirect:

Our trust.

Our eyes.

Our hearts.

Back toward God.

Therefore:

Do not wait until your Egypt falls before learning to trust the Lord.

Do not wait until your Cush is carried away before recognizing where salvation truly comes from.

Build your confidence now upon:

The God who never needs rescue.

The God who never becomes captive.

The God who never loses control.

The God who alone is worthy of ultimate trust.

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father,

You alone are our true refuge.

You alone are our ultimate Deliverer.

Forgive us for placing too much confidence in:

People.

Money.

Governments.

Institutions.

Human strength.

Political alliances.

Our own wisdom.

Father, we thank You for every person and resource You use to help us.

But keep us from turning Your gifts into our gods.

Teach us to distinguish between:

Human assistance.

And divine salvation.

Father, give us hearts like Isaiah.

Give us courage to obey even when obedience is:

Uncomfortable.

Embarrassing.

Difficult.

Costly.

Help us follow You more than we follow public opinion.

Thank You for warning us before consequences come.

Give us ears to hear Your warnings.

Give us humility to respond before discipline becomes necessary.

When human help fails:

Keep us from despair.

Turn our eyes toward You.

When our Egypt falls:

Remind us You remain.

When our Cush becomes weak:

Remind us You remain strong.

When the question rises:

“How then can we escape?”

Remind us that salvation belongs to You.

May our confidence rest in:

You alone.

Our Rock.

Our Refuge.

Our Defender.

Our Savior.

In Jesus' name,

Amen.

Key Verse

“Those who trusted in Cush and boasted in Egypt will be dismayed and put to shame.” —
Isaiah 20:5

Central Truth

God uses Isaiah’s dramatic prophetic sign to warn that Egypt and Cush will themselves be humiliated by Assyria, exposing the weakness of human alliances and teaching His people that earthly powers may provide temporary help but only the Lord can provide ultimate deliverance.

Isaiah 20 in One Sentence

Isaiah becomes a living prophetic sign for three years, portraying the coming humiliation of Egypt and Cush under Assyria and warning everyone who trusted those nations that human power cannot become a true savior, because lasting deliverance belongs to the Lord alone.