

July 9

Isaiah 18, 19, 20, 30-31

So, today, we have lessons from the "Naked Guy" - also known as Isaiah - about Judah, Assyria and Egypt...

Isaiah 19 opens up with the various punishments Egypt will endure as a result of her idolatry. The last part of the chapter seems to be pointing well beyond the days of Isaiah and his fellow Old Testament prophets, specifically to the relationship between Egypt and Assyria. Egyptians and Assyrians had never in biblical times been allies. And the kind of cooperation that Isaiah 19 envisions has never existed between these two countries even to the present day. Although both of these are now Islamic states, Egypt and present day Iraq are still not exactly allies. (Remember, Egypt sided with the west in the first Gulf War.) The passage also points to a time when large numbers of Egyptians and Assyrians will be worshipping the Lord. There was a time, in the pre-Christian era, when a large group of Jews moved to Egypt and a worship center was established, but they were transplanted Jews who were worshipping there. In the Christian era, a Christian presence has been found in Egypt since the days of the Ethiopian Eunuch of Acts chapter 8, who presumably went back to his homeland to establish a church. But it has never been extremely large or strong. I believe, as do many biblical students, that Isaiah 19 is looking down the corridors of time to a day that has not yet arrived; a time -- perhaps during the millennium, when great portions of what we now call the Middle East will turn away from their divisions to worship the Living God and the Son He has sent from heaven; to a time when that troubled part of the world will no longer be plagued by religious war and strife, because all together we'll worship the One who is the Prince of Peace!!

One of the ways you can tell that Isaiah is talking about things still in the future is the phrase "In that day" - we might ask "What Day?" - it is the Day of the LORD mentioned in Joel... And that day refers to the future reign of Jesus.

Moving on to chapter 20 it began with the end of Isaiah's prophecy against Egypt. Its message is graphic and powerful. After the death of Ahaz, Judah began to follow a distinctly pro-Egypt strategy. The fate of Ashdod, one of the five great cities of Philistia, was a clear and distinct warning that Egypt was not to be relied upon. The consistent message of Isaiah throughout this Book is that there is no security, no safety, in political alliances. When Ashdod fell, God called upon Isaiah to deliver a rather unsettling wordless message, "Strip down to your underwear and walk around like that for three years to show Israel how Egypt is going to be humiliated." The only problem with that wordless message, of course, is that God's prophet is going to be humiliated in the process as well.

Some people think he was in the ancient version of skivvies, others think he was buck naked.

I don't know about you, but if God gave me this command I think I might change professions. I am not thinking that 'naked pastor' would go over real big at CCC!

So, the next time you are thinking "My calling is pretty hard." just remember our friend, Isaiah the prophet...if he went naked for three years to carry a message from God, then you and I can do whatever God asks of us!!

Now, in talking so much about Isaiah's obedience, I don't want us to miss its significance. The wordless message of his naked travels was the same as the verbal message that he had been proclaiming right along in this great book. "If you rely on anything or anyone other than the Lord, this is how you will end up." 'Don't trust Assyria' -- Isaiah had said to Ahaz -- 'trust God!' When Hezekiah stopped trusting Assyria and started trusting Egypt, Isaiah said, 'Don't trust in Egypt. Trust God.'

Shifting to Isaiah 30-31

The whole idea of looking for help in a political alliance with Egypt is, to Isaiah's way of thinking, so absurd as to be nearly inconceivable. But that is exactly what Judah, in Hezekiah's day, was doing. It was a remarkable action for at least three reasons.

First, it was amazing because it meant that Hezekiah, a godly king, was making exactly the same mistake as Ahaz before him. Ahaz, afraid of Israel and Syria, had sought help from Assyria. Isaiah had rebuked him for that, and now everyone knew that Isaiah had been right. Against Ahaz, Isaiah had brought the great "Emmanuel" prophecy. His word had been to "sanctify the Lord in your hearts and let Him be your fear and let Him be your dread." Now the threat is from Assyria, and Hezekiah, who saw how big Ahaz' mistake was, is ready to repeat the exact same mistake by looking to Egypt, all in the face of repeated pleas from God to just "trust me." I am sure that Hezekiah would have jumped up and down and shouted at Isaiah: "But this is different. I've done my homework. Egypt does not have the territorial designs that Assyria does. Ahaz was foolish, but this is good for Judah." But, no matter how much he protested, it wasn't different. He was making the very same mistake all over again. And we are just the same!!

The second reason that this alliance with Egypt was so distressing to Isaiah, was because it was Egypt that Judah was looking to, and of all the nations to which Israel ought to have enough sense not to look, Egypt was number one. Israel had sought refuge there once before and had become enslaved. Hello! Remember 400 years of slavery! Duh!

The third reason for the prophet's dismay at the conduct of his people is purely pragmatic. Egypt is not able to help. She is not strong enough to challenge Assyria. Her help is utterly useless. In 30:7 she is called 'Rahab, the Do-Nothing.' Isaiah uses the term quite sarcastically. "Who is Egypt? Is she the ancient sea monster with all the power of chaos at her command? Hardly. She is more like a fat old grandmother sitting sleepily in the sun." (Oswalt, p. 548) She is 'Rahab' -- the one

who sits and does nothing. Why go to all the trouble and expense of buying her help? She cannot help!!

The last thing I want you to remember about what we read together today is that the response of the people to the messages brought to them by Isaiah and all of the other prophets was amazingly consistent: "They say to the seers, 'see no more visions' and the prophets, 'give us no more visions of what is right. Tell us pleasant things; prophesy illusions. Leave this way, get off this path and stop confronting us with the Holy One of Israel.'" 2700 years really haven't changed very much. "Tell us what we want to hear and don't make us look too carefully at a Holy God." It makes us too uncomfortable!!

Well, be sure to tune in tomorrow. Hezekiah makes his decision and the results are truly of "Biblical Proportions." You know, the same is true for us. The whole ballgame rests on whether we will trust in God. Will You trust him today?