

## Isaiah Chapter 20, Hebrew Text with Translation and Footnotes

### Historical Interlude:

#### Isaiah's Walking Naked and Barefoot for Three Years— A Prophetic Sign to Israel of Egypt and Ethiopia's Coming Captivity to Assyria<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>**Chapter 20** has five end-notes: (1) Ashdod, Modern and Ancient; (2) Sargon II and His Son Sennacherib; (3) Sargon II, King of Assyria; (4) Esarhaddon of Assyria; and (5) Lachish Relief in Sennacherib's Palace in Nineveh.

Slotki states that **chapter 20** consists of "Symbolic acts by the prophet which announced an Assyrian conquest of Egypt and Ethiopia." (P. 93)

Alexander comments on **chapter 20** that "About the time of the Assyrian attack on Ashdod, the prophet is directed to walk naked and barefoot, as a sign of the defeat and captivity of the Egyptians and Ethiopians who were at war with Assyria. **Verse 1** fixes the date of this symbolical transaction; **verse 2** contains the Divine command and the record of its execution; **verses 3-4** explain the meaning of the symbol; **verses 5-6** predict its effect, or rather that of the event which it prefigured." (P. 365)

Gray entitles **chapter 20** "Mitsraim and Cush (Egypt and Ethiopia) are to be taken captive by Assyria."

He comments that "For three years, including the year of the capture of Ashdod by the Assyrians, Isaiah by command of Yahweh went about 'naked' (i.e. half-clad [is this really what 'naked' means?]) and barefoot, like a captive, as a portent that Mitsraim [Egypt] and Cush [Ethiopia], on whom the Palestinian states at this time relied for help against Assyria, would, so far from giving help, themselves be taken captive by Assyria.

"Sargon's inscriptions...enable us to date the capture of Ashdod; it took place in 711 B.C.E. These inscriptions also state directly that Judah was drawn into the revolt, and into the appeal to Pir'u, king of Mutsur [Egypt], for help against Assyria. Isaiah's conduct was directed, though unsuccessfully, towards keeping Hezekiah and Judah out of an anti-Assyrian alliance with the neighboring states...

"The siege of Ashdod falls a year, or perhaps as much as three years, after Sabako, in establishing the Ethiopian dynasty in Egypt, had re-established a strong central government in the Nile valley. Isaiah, in this case, is affirming that the new government in Egypt, though it may be stronger, will nevertheless bring no strength to the Palestinian states against Assyria. His expectation that Assyria would take captive and carry into exile the people of Egypt and Ethiopia was not fulfilled; it was a full generation after the capture of Ashdod before an Assyrian army even entered Egypt, but it is obvious that Isaiah was right in expecting that the Palestinian states would receive no effective aid from outside." (Pp. 343-43)

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[This is a rather unusual comment by Alexander, who usually either defends the historical fulfilment of a prophecy, or states that it is only meant “metaphorically.” But here he bluntly states that Isaiah’s expectation “was not fulfilled.” Do you hold tht this means Alexander is a non-believer?]

Gray adds that “The chapter is probably in the main derived from an early biography of the prophet—not from the autobiography from which **chapters 6-8** are drawn; for in **verse 3** as well as in **verse 2** Isaiah (the son of Amots, **verse 2** as in the titles **1:1**, **2:1** and **13:1**) is referred to in the 3<sup>rd</sup> person. In form the chapter consists of two Divine oracles, **verses 2b** and **verses 3-6**, separated from one another in time by three years, and a brief introduction, **verses 1**, **2a**, defining the occasion of the oracles.” (P. 344)

Oswalt comments on **chapter 20** that it “concludes Isaiah’s oracle against Egypt. As such it forms a graphic summary of the prophet’s opinion of trust in Egypt. Egypt herself was under judgment, and reliance on her was useless. As an example, he takes the city of Ashdod, the northernmost of the five great Philistine cities, which lay about 33 miles west of Jerusalem and about 2 or 3 miles inland...

“When the Ethiopian Shabako was able to consolidate Upper and Lower Egypt in 714 B.C.E., he immediately began to foment rebellion against Sargon, who had been very busy for the better part of a decade quashing revolts in Babylon and the northwest (Urartu). Perhaps Shabako felt safe in this situation. But events were to prove otherwise, for Sargon was rapidly getting the upper hand over his adversaries and that was to be true as much in the west as it was elsewhere...

“The leading city of the revolt was Ashdod, over which Sargon had set up a regent favorable to himself, a man named Ahimiti. Now, probably with the backing of Shabako, Ahimiti was deposed and another man, Yamani, was made king (If the statement in Sargon’s annals is correctly understood, Yamani means ‘Ionian’ [‘Greek’]). This perhaps represents a continuing relation between the Philistines and their old homeland, the Aegean region), apparently in 713 B.C.E. Sargon claims that he led his personal bodyguard in this action, apparently not waiting for levies to be raised from subject countries, as was the normal practice. However, the biblical statement that the *tartan*...led the fight is probably more strictly accurate, since kings were prone to claim full responsibility for all victories in annalistic reports.

“The reference to the bodyguard may well indicate a very sudden attack. At any rate, the Assyrians report a swift victory, with Yamani fleeing to Egypt for asylum and Ashdod falling in 711 B.C.E. The Egyptians, faced with an Assyrian army on their borders, lost all of their bluster about defying Assyria and meekly handed over a bound Yamani, undertaking to send him all the way to Assyria. Undoubtedly the action created a chill in the hearts of Egypt’s loyal allies and served to confirm the jaundiced view of Egypt held by people like Isaiah.

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<sup>1</sup>(...continued)

“It is against this backdrop that Isaiah, prompted by God, took his stand. He acted out the truth that Egypt was as much subject to defeat and capture as any other nation and that reliance on her was as foolish as it had been for Ashdod and Yamani.” (Pp. 382-84)

Notice that Oswalt has obtained much of this historical information from the Annals of the Assyrian kings Sargon and Sennacherib—see our end-note 2 for a summary of those annals.

Motyer comments on **chapter 20** that “For the third time, Isaiah offers a fulfilment within the immediate future, which when people see it happening will provide ground for their faith in the Lord’s greater and wider purposes...”

“The Assyrian campaign against Ashdod (**verse 1**) took place in 711. For the previous four years Egypt had been unsettling the western Palestinian states with promises of aid should they rise against Assyria, and by 713 Ashdod was in rebellion. As a consequence, Assyria deposed its king and put another in his place, but Ashdod was not to be deterred. The new king was ousted and (with the evil genius of Egypt looming in the background) envoys were sent to call Judah, Edom and Moab to join the rising. Since Hezekiah suffered no Assyrian reprisals at this time he probably held aloof; it could even be that he was swayed by Isaiah’s views as expressed in **chapter 18**. But Ashdod did not escape. Sargon II, now at the height of his power, sent his supreme commander (**verse 1**). Ashdod was reduced and became an Assyrian province. Egypt, true to form, reneged on its promises...”

“At some time in all this Isaiah initiated an acted oracle by going about *stripped and barefoot* (**verse 2**). His intention in miming [using gesture and movement without words in the acting out of a role] the plight of captives was to expose the futility of trusting Egypt...”

“When this fate came upon Egypt before his audience’s very eyes (**verses 5-6**) they would realize the hopelessness of the policy they had adopted. Such was the historical setting of Isaiah’s acted oracle. He visibly committed himself to the veracity of the word given to him and they would see it fulfilled...”

“But why does he include it here in his collected works? He has been outlining a world-wide hope (**19:16-25**) in which three nations of his own day have figured: his own people, the imperial Assyria and the would-be imperial Egypt. His vision for them has been astounding—the two superpowers would be joined to tiny Judah as one people in one world under one God (**19:23-25**). Is this credible?...”

“To prove that it is, Isaiah records an incident showing that precisely these world empires—in the heyday [pinnacle, high point] of their power—are subject to the word of

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בְּשָׁנָה בָּא תָרְתָן אֲשֶׁדּוּדָה 20:1<sup>2</sup>

בְּשִׁלַח אֶת־וְסָרְגֹן מֶלֶךְ אַשּׁוּר

וַיִּלְחָם בְּאַשְׁדּוּד

וַיִּלְכְּדָהּ:

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<sup>1</sup>(...continued)

the Lord. Nothing, therefore, is impossible. What is of significance is not a human estimate of what can happen but that the Lord has spoken.” (P. 170)

Yes...but is there anything said in **Isaiah 19:23-25** about Egypt and Assyrian “joining tiny Judah” as one people? The three nations are depicted as united in the worship of YHWH, and as being at peace with one another, but nothing is said about them “joining” or “proselyting to” tiny Judah.

Watts comments that ‘The chapter is a sober narrative. The opening phrase sets the historical frame (**verse 1**). The **second verse** narrates a command for a symbolic act by His prophet, Isaiah. **Verses 3-6** are a Yahweh word with its echo explaining the symbolic action.” (P. 264)

<sup>2</sup>Alexander translates / comments on **verse 1**: “*In the year of Tartan’s coming to Ashdod, in Sargon, king of Assyria’s sending him (i.e. when Sargon, king of Assyria, sent him), and he fought with Ashdod (i.e. besieged it) and took it...*”

“Ashdod was one of the five cities of the Philistines (**Joshua 11:22; 15:46; 1 Samuel 5:1**).” [Ashdod is mentioned in each of these passages, but nothing is said concerning the ‘five cities’; however, see **Joshua 13:3** and **1 Samuel 6:17** where it seems apparent that the five city-states of Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod, Ekron and Gath formed a five-city group (“pentapolis”), from Wadi Gaza in the south to the Yarqon River in the north.]

Alexander continues: “[Ashdod,] on account of its strong fortifications (from which its name is supposed to be derived [the verb **שָׁדַד** means ‘deal violently’] was the ‘key of Egypt’ [that is, if you could get through Ashdod, you could enter into Egypt next] and therefore was frequently attacked in the wars between Egypt and Assyria. According to Herodotus, Psammetichus [an Egyptian Pharaoh] besieged it twenty-nine years. This, if not an exaggeration, is the longest siege in history, and probably took place after what is here recorded, in order to recover Ashdod from Assyria.” (P. 365)

Oswalt comments on **verse 1** that “Like **Isaiah 7:1**, this verse introduces the historic setting and gives a full resume of the outcome.” (P. 384)

In (the) year<sup>3</sup> of Tartan's / the General's<sup>4</sup> coming to Ashdod,<sup>5, 1</sup>  
when Sargon,<sup>2</sup> King of Assyria<sup>6, 3</sup> sent him,  
and he fought against Ashdod,

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<sup>3</sup>Slotki dates the coming of Sargon's general to Ashdod as 711 B.C.E. (P. 93)  
This is the same date that Gray and others give. Watts states that "The year is  
apparently 712 or 711 B.C.E. (P. 264)

<sup>4</sup>תַּרְתָּן, **thartan**, is a loan-word from the Assyrian, *tartânu*, *turtânu*, the title of an  
Assyrian general = field-marshal. Slotki states that it is "the military title of the supreme  
commander or chief of staff." (P. 93) Compare **2 Kings 18:17a**, the only other  
passage in the **Hebrew Bible** where the name "Tartan" occurs.

And Assyria's king sent forth Tartan,  
and Rab-Saris, and Rab-Shaqeh,  
from Lakhish to the King Hezekiah,  
with a great army, [to] Jerusalem.

Gray states that "In Assyrian, *turtanu*, *tartanu*, is the name of the officer, or  
officers—for as early as Sargon's time there seem to have been two—who ranked in the  
Assyrian army next after the king." (P. 344)

<sup>5</sup>אַשְׁדּוֹד, **ashdodh**," is a Philistine city, located on the Mediterranean sea-coast  
some 33 miles to the west of Jerusalem, and in biblical times, some 2 or 3 miles from  
the coast (but today on the coast). See our end-note 1 for a **Wikipedia** article on  
Ashdod, including ancient and modern Ashdod.

<sup>6</sup>Slotki states that Sargon [this is Sargon II, so called because of the much earlier  
Sargon of Akkad, also known as Sargon the Great, who reigned in Mesopotamia from  
2334 to 2279 B.C.E.] reigned from 722-705 B.C.E., and was one of the best-known  
kings of Assyria." (P. 93)

"Best known" perhaps in the ancient Near East, but not in the **Hebrew Bible**, for  
this is the only occurrence of his name there. However, there is an unusual amount of  
information available concerning him and his son Sennacherib that can be seen in  
Pritchard's **Ancient Near Eastern Texts**, pp. 284-88. See our end-note 2.

Alexander explains that "Sargon was a king of Assyria mentioned only here,  
because his reign was very short, and this was the only occurrence that brought him  
into contact with the Jews." (P. 366)

See our end-note 3 for a **Wikipedia** article on King Sargon II.

and captured it.<sup>7</sup>

20:2<sup>8</sup> בַּעַת הַהִיא דִּבֶּר יְהוָה בְּיַד יִשְׁעִיהוּ בֶן-אֲמוֹץ לֵאמֹר

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<sup>7</sup>Gray comments that “The Hebrew narrative means that the Tartan, and not Sargon in person, conducted the operations against Ashdod. Sargon in his inscription says, ‘I marched on Ashdod...I besieged, I conquered (it).’ (**Annals**, 224-25) But this seems to be merely a case of a king recording the events of his reign as his own personal exploits.” (P. 345)

Watts comments that “Assyrian texts report that Azuri, king of Ashdod, withheld tribute and tried to organize a coalition of states to rebel...This could well have taken place over several years and may have included contacts with Hezekiah. This brought Sargon’s forces back into the area.

“The Assyrian military action was thorough. Ashdod and its allies, including Gath, were defeated. A new king, approved by the Assyrians, was soon deposed by a Greek, Iamani. The Assyrians intervened again, reorganized the government, and deported some of their people, bringing in others from the east. The same report mentions friendly notes from the king of Ethiopia...

“Not since **chapter 7** has the [**Book of Isaiah**] presented an event with such precise dating. Sargon ruled from 722-705 B.C.E. He was a strong and effective king.” (P. 264)

Of course, the **Book of Isaiah** itself does not give any precise dates such as the century, year, etc. It dates the events by mentioning them, oftentimes relating those dates to the reign of kings, or to some widely known event, but it is through the annals of the Assyrian kings that precise dating of texts such as this is enabled. However, when we come to the **Book of Ezekiel**, much more precise dating by the prophet himself begins to occur.

<sup>8</sup>Watts comments that the opening phrase, which he translates by “‘In that period,’ broadens the time span of ‘in that year’ in **verse 1** to make room for the ‘three years’ of **verse 3**. It is intentionally locating the following events in the period immediately before the invasion in 711 B.C.E.” (P. 264)

Oswalt comments on **verses 2-4** that “The language here does not express the sequence of events very clearly. Evidently the Lord had spoken to Isaiah prior to the actual attack on and fall of Ashdod, since he had acted out his prophecy for at least fourteen months (parts of three years, **verse 3**). However, the interpretation of the activity was not given until the end of its duration. Thus it may be that the speaking *by the hand of Isaiah* (normally speech directed to others) was not the directions contained in **verse 2** but the interpretation given in **verse 3**. In that case, the appropriate reading would be: ‘At that time the Lord spoke by the hand of Isaiah, son of Amoz—having said, ‘Go...’ And he had done this...then the Lord said, etc.’

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“The symbolic action here is the only one reported of Isaiah, but such activity was fairly frequent with Jeremiah and Ezekiel. Like the parables of Jesus, these actions were capable of being misconstrued by hardened hearts, but they certainly could not be overlooked. Here Isaiah was acting out the fate of captives. Although it was not always the case (some art objects picture captives clothed to a greater of lesser extent), captives were frequently stripped naked when led into captivity...The chief aim seems to be public disgrace, the demonstration that the thing in which the captive had trusted for help had been unable to save his name and reputation.” (Pp. 384-85)

Watts compares Hosea’s marriage, which was broken through his wife’s prostitution, and then renewed, as an acted out symbol for YHWH’s relationship to Israel (**Hosea 1-3**), and Jeremiah’s yoke (**Jeremiah 27-28**) that he wore as a symbol for Judah and its neighbors being made slaves by Babylon. (P. 264)

Slotki states that **verse 2** “is parenthetic [inserted as an explanation] and explanatory of **verse 3**.” (P. 93) Biblical Hebrew has no signs for parentheses as we do in English.

Alexander translates / comments on **verse 2**: “*At that time spake Jehovah by the hand of Isaiah, the son of Amoz, saying, Go, and thou shalt open (i.e. loose) the sackcloth from upon thy loins, and thy shoe thou shalt pull off from upon thy foot. And he did so, going naked and barefoot...*”

“Maimonides, Kimchi, and [others], suppose this to have been done merely in vision. This supposition is not altogether arbitrary, i.e. without any intimation in the text, but is rendered more improbable by the expression that he did so, as well as by the statement in the next verse, that the act required was to be a sign or symbol to the spectators, which certainly implies that it was really exhibited. This supposition...seems to have been resorted to in order to avoid the conclusion that the prophet really appeared before the people in a state of nudity. It is commonly agreed, however, that this was not the case. The word ‘naked’ is used to express partial denudation...As biblical examples [the following verses] may be cited:

**1 Samuel 19:24**, [in the story about King Saul’s second experience of prophesying (see **1 Samuel 10:10-12** for Saul’s first experience, before he was King):

And he stripped off—even / also he [Saul]--his clothes,  
and he prophesied—even / also he [Saul] before Samuel.  
And he fell naked all that day, and all the night.  
For that reason they said, Is Saul also among the prophets?]

**2 Samuel 6:20**, [an incident in the story of David’s dancing as the ark of the covenant is returned to Jerusalem:

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<sup>8</sup>(...continued)

And Mikhel [his wife], Saul's daughter went forth to meet David.

And she said, How honored today, King of Israel--  
who was uncovered today in (the) eyes of his servant's hand-maids,  
like uncovering himself one of the vain / empty men is uncovered!  
(The word "naked" does not occur here; but the word "uncover oneself" is used,  
and nothing is said about being "partially" uncovered. Why do you think Mikhel  
got so angry at David, if he had only took off his shirt, etc.?)]

**Amos 2:16**, [depicting what will happen when YHWH's judgment comes on Northern Israel:

And he whose heart is mighty among the strong men,  
will run away naked on that day--  
(it is) a saying of YHWH.]

**John 21:7**,

[Therefore that disciple whom the Jesus was loving said to the Peter:  
It is the Lord!

Therefore Simon Peter, hearing that it is the Lord,  
put on his outer garment, for he was naked;  
and he threw himself into the sea  
(evidently anxious to swim to shore, with his clothing on, in order to not be naked  
when coming to Jesus)]." (P. 367)

We do not see how these passages tell us anything relevant to the text of **Isaiah 20**; they certainly do not lead us to believe that "naked" meant only half-dressed.

Oswalt comments that "In any case, this behavior [of Isaiah] would not have been easy to undertake. Should someone do such things in our society, it is not difficult to imagine the comments and reactions. In a culture which makes well-balanced behavior a fetish (except in regard to sporting events [or politics]), the prophets would not be welcomed. We are ill at ease in the presence of fanatics, people who are wholly committed to an idea, a program, or even another person [think in terms of presidential elections!]. Our idea is coolness, a non-committal reserve which prevents us from belonging to anything but ourselves or to attachments we have defined...

"In truth, this has always been humanity's ideal, and it is one the prophets reject heartily. For Isaiah, once he knew God's will, this sort of behavior was not aberrant [abnormal] at all. It was wholly in keeping with the passion of his life--to live in glad response to that Holy One Who had changed Isaiah, unbidden, from a filthy wreck to a clean person. (Note the term of approval which God gave to Isaiah: 'My servant.' This would have come as an affirmation to the humiliated prophet. It also strikes a resonant chord with the vision of the servant portrayed in later chapters of the **Book**)." (P. 385)



לֵךְ וּבִתְחִלַּת הַשָּׁקִי מֵעַל מִתְנַיִךְ  
וְנִעַלְךָ תַּחֲלִיץ מֵעַל רַגְלֶיךָ  
וַיַּעַשׂ לְךָ הָלֵךְ עָרוֹם וַיִּחַף:

At that time,<sup>9</sup> YHWH spoke by (the) hand of<sup>10</sup> Isaiah, son of Amots, saying:<sup>11</sup>  
Go--and you shall loosen the sack-cloth<sup>12</sup> from upon your waist,

<sup>9</sup>Slotki comments that the phrase “at that time” is pointing to “Three years before the event described in **verses 3-6**.” (P. 93)

<sup>10</sup>Where our Hebrew text has בְּיַד, “by (the) hand of,” the Greek translation (**Rahlfs**) has πρὸς, “to.”

<sup>11</sup>Oswalt translates by “having said” in order to “convey the sequence of statements to the modern reader.” (P. 381)

<sup>12</sup>Slotki comments that “sackcloth” is “a garment made of course linen or some hairy material, worn by ascetics or mourners as an upper garment. Isaiah was in mourning for the exiles of the Northern Kingdom.” (Pp 93-94)

Gray comments that “שֵׁק always denotes an article of dress worn in mourning, or as a token of distress. Consequently, ‘to untie some one’s sackcloth’ is a figurative expression meaning to cause, or give to, any one joy.” See **Psalms 30:12**<sup>Heb</sup> / **11**<sup>Eng</sup>:

You turned my wailing into a dance!  
You loosed my sackcloth for me,  
and You clothed me with gladness!

Gray adds that “In the present passage שֵׁק certainly seems to require, and has commonly received, another interpretation; it is said to be a distinctive but regular dress of the prophet, and is compared with the ‘hairy garment’ of the prophets, who are slightly referred to in **Zechariah 13:4** [אַדְרֵת שֵׁעָרָה, ‘cloak of hair’], or the camel’s-hair raiment of John the Baptist, or the sheepskin, or the like, which, it is precariously argued, was Elijah’s official dress.

Compare **2 Kings 1:8** [Elijah is to be בַּעַל שֵׁעָרָה, ‘a master / owner of hair’—but what does that mean? Could it mean he had more hair than most other men?] and [**Rahlf’s** *μηλωτή*, ‘sheepskin’] in **1 Kings 19:19** [Elijah threw אַדְרֵתוֹ, ‘his cloak’ upon Elisha], **2 Kings 2:13-14** [‘upon Elijah’s being carried away into heaven, Elisha took up

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and your sandal<sup>13</sup> you shall take off from upon your feet!

And he did so, walking naked<sup>14</sup> and barefoot.

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<sup>12</sup>(...continued)

Elijah's אֵלֶּיךָ רָרַת, with which he struck the water of the Jordan, and the water was parted—that is, it was a power-filled cloak].” (Pp. 345-46)

<sup>13</sup>Where our Hebrew text has נַעֲלֶיךָ, “your sandal,” **Rahlfs** has τὰ σανδάλιά σου, “the sandals of yours,” and the other ancient versions also have the plural.

<sup>14</sup>Slotki comments that עָרוֹם, “naked,” “means without an upper [outer?] garment, wearing only his upper tunic (*kuttoneth*). The word is similarly used in **Amos 2:16; Micah 1:8.**” (P. 94)

Reading this comment, we assume these two passages will explain what the word “naked” really means. But this is not at all the case: both of these passages simply say “naked”—without any explanations, such as Slotki attempts to give for **Isaiah 20:2.**

**Amos 2:16,**

And one whose heart is mighty among the strong men,  
naked will flee in that day—  
(it is) a saying of YHWH.

**Micah 1:8,** where Micah is depicted as mourning the fall of Northern Israel:

For this reason I will wail and I will howl;  
I will go / walk barefoot and naked.  
I will make a wailing like the jackals,  
and mourning like daughters of an ostrich!

We have seen this same thing happening numerous times, as commentators refer to passages in support of their view, but upon investigation it becomes obvious that the passages referred to offer no real support. We wonder if we ourselves have been guilty of this same thing. The lesson is, read all such references carefully!

Gray translates by “half-clad,” and comments that it means “wearing the inner garment only instead of the two which constituted the normal attire; so **Micah 1:8** [see above] and, perhaps, **Ezekiel 18:7, 17** [both verses have the phrase וְעִירָם יְכַסֶּה ‘and a naked person he covers / covered (with) a garment’]; **Isaiah 58:7** [when you see a naked person, cover him].” (P. 346) None of these passages referred to by

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<sup>14</sup>(...continued)

Gray show anything about what “naked” means, certainly not indicating that it means “half-clad,” or that it has to do with differing portions of garments commonly worn.

Gray goes on to say that “The Hebrew words “no doubt commonly meant absolutely naked (**Genesis 3:7; 10-11**); but like γυμνός...they had also the meaning of half-clad; even in this condition Isaiah would have exposed himself during three years to jeers and contempt.” (P. 346) Perhaps, but we have not seen any evidence for the adjective used with the meaning “half-clad.”

And we wonder—Is this an example of “western” interpreters reading their ideas of “modesty” into the biblical stories of an ancient culture that may have had quite different ideas of modesty?

I recall how the church I served in Plano, Texas, sponsored a large group of Kurdish refugees, who had suffered under Saddam Hussein. We got them temporary lodging in a large motel on the east side of town, and started the process of teaching English as a second language, etc. Then one morning I received a phone call from the irate motel manager, telling me in no uncertain terms to come and get these crazy people out of his motel! I hurried to the motel to find out what had gone wrong—and he excitedly told me how they had gone swimming completely naked! After I had explained to the Kurds what the manager was so mad about, they agreed that in the future they would begin wearing swim-suits—something they had never done before in their homeland in northern Iraq!

And we wonder—If Isaiah had only taken off an outer garment, and was walking around “half-clad,” would the people have paid any attention, or questioned what it meant? We think not. What do you think?

<sup>15</sup>Watts comments on **verses 3-4** that “A word from God interprets the sign which had now been acted out for some three years (i.e., 714-11 B.C.E.). It is a prediction that Assyria will conquer the peoples Egypt and Ethiopia, leading many of them captive back to Assyria along the highways of Palestine [we see no mention of ‘back to Assyria,’ or ‘along the highways of Palestine’].

“Political changes had occurred in Egypt during this period. Shabaka, the Ethiopian king, consolidated his hold on Egypt’s Delta. The scheming kings of the Delta cities who conspired to keep the Palestinians in revolt against Assyria were gone. No effective help would be forthcoming from Egypt in that period.” (Pp. 264-65)

Perhaps...but it is tempting to commentators to read into the biblical stories, which are confirmed by the ancient monuments—such as this one—additional details that are not actually found in the biblical text or in the monuments either.

(continued...)

כַּאֲשֶׁר הִלְךְ עֲבָדִי יִשְׁעִיָּהוּ עָרוֹם וַיִּחַף שְׁלֹשׁ שָׁנִים  
אֹת וּמִזִּפְתַּי עַל-מִצְרַיִם וְעַל-כּוּשׁ׃

And YHWH said,

Just as My servant Isaiah walked naked and barefoot (for) three years—<sup>16</sup>

<sup>15</sup>(...continued)

Slotki states that **verse 3** “resumes the narrative begun in **verse 1** and explains the symbolism of the prophet’s action.” (P. 94)

Yes, but we wonder. Did Isaiah say nothing to the people who stared at him walking naked for three years? Was the interpretation of his action only to be given at the end of the three years?

Alexander translates **verse 3**: “*And Jehovah said, As My servant Isaiah has gone naked and barefoot three years a sign and symbol concerning Egypt and concerning Ethiopia.*” (P. 367)

Motyer states that “All through the period of intense Egyptian anti-Assyrian diplomacy the people had watched Isaiah [walking about naked and barefoot], wondering what his behavior portended. Since they would have known his mind on the topic of rebellion, they may have assumed that from the start he was telling them the rebels were doomed and would go captive before Assyria. But no. The word of the Lord concerned Egypt herself (linked with Cush because the Ethiopian dynasty was in power). It was captive Egyptians Isaiah was forecasting.” (P. 171)

Perhaps...but nothing is said in the text concerning what those who saw Isaiah walking barefoot and naked thought or said to or concerning him. In fact, Isaiah’s action, as well as his message, was filled with the enigmatic, with puzzle—and as far as this text goes, it was only after the three years of nakedness in public, that the Divine explanation was given.

<sup>16</sup>Alexander states that “It has been a question with interpreters whether the words *three years* are to be connected with what follows or what goes before. The **Septuagint** gives both solutions, by repeating τρία ἔτη (‘three years’) [Our **Rahlfs Septuaginta** does not repeat the phrase, and we wonder what **Septuagint** Alexander was reading]. The Masoretic [pointing] throws the words into the second clause, *three years a sign*, etc. This construction is adopted by some modern [19<sup>th</sup> century] writers for the purpose of avoiding the conclusion that Isaiah walked naked and barefoot for the space of three years, which is certainly the obvious and *prima facie* [based on the first impression] meaning of the words...

“Those who adhere to the Masoretic accents [which were developed and applied in the early Middle Ages--chiefly done by Aaron ben Moses ben Asher (10<sup>th</sup> century

(continued...)

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<sup>16</sup>(...continued)

C.E., in the Tiberias school, based on the oral tradition for reading the Tanakh, hence the name Tiberian vocalization; but also including some innovations of Ben Naftali (also 10<sup>th</sup> century C.E.) and the Babylonian exiles] understand the second clause to mean a *three years' sign and wonder*, i.e. either a sign of something to occur in three years, or to continue three years, or a sign for three years of a subsequent event...

“Those who connect three years with what precedes, either understand the language strictly as denoting that the prophet continued to go naked and barefoot for that space of time, or palliate the harshness of this supposition by assuming that he only appeared thus when he went abroad, or at certain set times, or occasionally...

“On the whole, the simplest and most satisfactory solution is that...the prophet... exposed himself but once in the way described, after which he continued to be a sign and wonder for three years, i.e. till the fulfillment of the prophecy.” (P. 368)

Such a comment rivals the rabbis in the **Babylonian Talmud** in their interpretation of biblical statements! The statement is simple and clear—Isaiah went about naked and barefoot for three years as a shocking sign to all who saw him. What is involved here, we think, is not the biblical statement—it is our offended sense of modesty, and our refusal to believe that Isaiah did not adhere to our standards of modesty.

And so we search for possible ways of understanding the words differently. Surely they don't mean what they say! And the first to attempt to alter the meaning of the text was made by the Jewish Masoretes in post-Christian centuries, from approximately the 6<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> centuries C.E.

Oswalt translates by “Just as My servant Isaiah went naked and barefoot, for three years it is a sign and portent against Egypt and against Ethiopia.” He comments that “Although most modern translations punctuate ‘for three years’ to go with the preceding clause, the Masoretic Text [meaning the way the Masoretes in the 6<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> centuries C.E. punctuated the text] clearly places it with the following clause (as does [Rahfs]; the Aramaic Targum is not clear). If the Masoretic pointing is correct, this is a three-year sign, not necessarily indicating the duration of the behavior, but rather the length of time to which the sign points...If the Masoretic pointing is right, we are simply not told how long Isaiah acted in this way.” (P. 382)

**Rahfs:** καὶ εἶπεν κύριος ὃν τρόπον πεπόρευται Ησαίας ὁ παῖς μου γυμνός καὶ ἀνυπόδετος τρία ἔτη ἔσται σημεῖα καὶ τέρατα τοῖς Αἰγυπτίοις καὶ Αἰθίοψιν, “And Lord said, Just as the servant of Mine Isaiah has walked naked and barefoot three years there will be signs and wonders / portents to the Egyptians and Ethiopians.”

(Here, the statement is ambiguous, and may be taken either way. We disagree with Oswalt that the phrase “clearly goes with the following clause.”)

(continued...)

a sign and a wonder<sup>17</sup> against Egypt and against Ethiopia,<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>(...continued)

**Ben Uzziel's Targum Jonathan:** "And the Lord said, Like as my servant Isaiah hath walked naked and barefoot three years for a sign and wonder upon Egypt and Cush:" [Targum Jonathan is dated approximately 50 B.C.E.]

<sup>17</sup>The two words, side by side, **אוֹת וּמוֹפֵת**, are apparently synonyms, "a sign and a wonder / sign / portent." Both words indicate that the prophet's walking naked and barefoot for three years has served as a "symbolic act," which would lead those seeing the prophet to wonder and ask what his strange behavior meant, but nothing is said in the text about reaction to the acted sign.

Alexander states that **מוֹפֵת** does not merely mean a *wonder*, but a *portent* or extraordinary premonition." (P. 367)

What would you think if your minister—or prominent religious leader of your community, say a Roman Catholic or Episcopal Bishop—went about naked and barefoot for three years? Would you or your church quickly get him committed to a mental asylum, where attendants would assure his keeping his clothes on?

What if he insisted that God had told him to go naked and barefoot, and that it was a sign from God that America's allies are going to be totally defeated by Isis or some other radical group? Would you believe him? An extraordinary premonition indeed! What if it were a prominent minister, whom you had come to deeply trust and respect, say, Billy Graham, or Martin Luther King Jr.?

<sup>18</sup>Alexander comments that the Hebrew word **כוּשׁ** "has been variously explained to mean a part of Arabia on the coast of the Red Sea...or this part of Arabia with the opposite part of Africa...but the latest [mid-19th century] authorities confirm the ancient explanation of the word as meaning *Ethiopia*. In the prophecies belonging to the reign of Hezekiah, Egypt and Ethiopia are frequently combined either because they were in close alliance, or because an Ethiopian dynasty then reigned in Upper Egypt." (Pp. 367-78)

We wonder, how could Isaiah's walking barefoot and naked have symbolic meaning for, or against Egypt and Ethiopia? Was he in their capital, walking barefoot and naked in the presence of their leaders? Or were there Egyptian / Ethiopian embassies in Jerusalem, before which he walked? Or was the symbolic action only meant for Jerusalem and Judah, informing them before it happened, that both Egypt and Ethiopia were soon to fall to the Assyrians, and therefore should not be trusted for help? The last seems the most reasonable.

But we are left in the realm of supposition, since the text is completely silent concerning this. And again we emphasize the enigmatic, puzzling, ambiguous nature of

(continued...)

<sup>18</sup>(...continued)  
the message of Isaiah!

<sup>19</sup>Alexander translates / comments on **verse 4**: “So shall the king of Assyria lead the captivity (i.e. the captives) of Egypt and the exiles of Ethiopia, young and old, naked and barefoot, with their buttocks uncovered, the nakedness (or disgrace) of Egypt. This verse completes the comparison begun in [**verse 3**].” (P. 368)

Motyer comments on **verse 4** that “Isaiah did not predict the conquest of Egypt but simply the sad sight of strings of captives being deported. This would have been the case after the battle of Eltekeh (701 B.C.E.), Egypt’s one essay against Assyria.” (P. 171)

See on the Internet, various articles concerning the battle of Eltekeh—some claiming victory for the Assyrians, others claiming victory for the Ethiopian-led Egyptians. No other commentator that we have read makes this same claim, and we

say **verse 4** certainly predicts the Assyrian conquest of Egypt and Ethiopia, and the leading away of their populations, young and old, i.e., everybody, into captivity / exile.

However this is decided, it seems clear that the loss of one battle between Egypt and Assyria outside of Egypt would not cause all of those who had trusted in Egypt and Ethiopia to completely lose heart, as if those in whom they trusted no longer existed.

Watts comments that “Political changes had occurred in Egypt during this period. Shabaka, the Ethiopian king, consolidated his hold on Egypt’s Delta. The scheming kings of the Delta cities who conspired to keep the Palestinians in revolt against Assyria were gone. No effective help would be forthcoming from Egypt in that period...

“There is no record of an Assyrian invasion of Egypt until the reign of Esarhaddon [Sennacherib’s son]. In 671 B.C.E. he defeated Tirhakah, occupied Memphis, and installed Assyrian governors over local Egyptian princes. A second rebellion was crushed by Ashurbanipal in 667 B.C.E. with Manasseh’s participation. On this occasion the rebel princes were marched to Nineveh, much in the way this verse pictures the march of captives.” (Pp. 264-65)

But did Isaiah predict the carrying of the “rebel princes” into captivity? As we read the text, it predicts the carrying of Egyptian and Ethiopian populations, young and old, into captivity. Esarhaddon’s conquest of Memphis in 671 B.C.E., with Tirhakah’s fleeing to Upper Egypt, followed by Esarhaddon’s son and successor Ashurbanipal’s restoration of Assyrian control in Egypt is a fulfilment of this prediction in Isaiah 20, perhaps overstated in terms of the leading away of their populations into captivity / exile! See our end-note 4, for a **Wikipedia** article on Esarhaddon.

נְעָרִים וְזַקְנִים עָרוֹם וַיִּחַף

וַחֲשׂוּפֵי שֵׁת עַרְוַת מִצְרַיִם:

so Assyria's king<sup>20, 4</sup> will lead / drive away<sup>21</sup> Egypt's captives, and Ethiopia's exiles--<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>Alexander states that “The king of Assyria here meant is neither Nebuchadnezzar...nor Esarhaddon...nor Shalmaneser, but either Sennacherib or Sargon himself.” (P. 369)

<sup>21</sup>The verb here is **יָנַחַג**, from the root **נָחַג**. Alexander states that “**נָחַג** is commonly applied to flocks and herds, and, like the Latin *ago*, corresponds both to *lead* and *drive* in English.” (P. 368)

<sup>22</sup>Where our Hebrew text has the noun **גְּלוּת**, “exile,” 1QIs<sup>a</sup> has the synonym **גּוּלָה**, with no difference in meaning.

Oswalt comments that “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 B.C.E., some forty years later. However, further reflection shows that his emphasis was not strange. In fact, it dealt with the real issue. For Ashdod's fate was not the major issue with which Judah should concern herself. The real issue was the fate of Egypt, fomentor of the rebellion. So Isaiah concerns himself with the cause of the rebellion, not the symptom. Not only will Egypt's lackies go into exile, he says, but so will Egypt herself. Mighty Egypt, rich in culture and glory, will be carried off in shame.” (P. 386)

From **Wikipedia** we quote: “In 671 B.C.E., Esarhaddon went to war against Pharaoh Taharqa of Egypt. Part of his army stayed behind to deal with rebellions in Tyre, and perhaps Ashkelon. The remainder went south to Rapihu [modern Raphia, on the southernmost end of the Gaza strip], then crossed the Sinai, a desert inhabited by dreadful and dangerous animals, and entered Egypt. In the summer, he took Memphis, and Taharqa fled to Upper Egypt...

“Esarhaddon now called himself ‘king of Egypt, Pathros, and Kush,’ and returned with rich booty from the cities of the Delta; he erected a victory stele at this time, showing the son of Taharqa in bondage, Prince Ushankhuru. Almost as soon as the king left, Egypt rebelled against Assyrian rule [which called for Ashurbanipal's return to Egypt to recapture the capital and restore Assyrian supremacy over Egypt].” (9/24/2016)



young and old, naked and barefoot,<sup>23</sup>  
and stripped buttocks--Egypt's nakedness!<sup>24, 5</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>Alexander holds that from this statement, it is clear that “the nakedness of **verse 2** was a partial one, since captives were not commonly reduced to a state of absolute nudity. This is confirmed by the addition of the word [יָחַף] *barefoot* in both cases, which would be superfluous if *naked* had its strictest sense.” (P. 368)

What do you think? Would you not call a person “naked” if he or she was wearing sandals, but not a stitch of clothing?

<sup>24</sup>The last phrase of **verse 4**, עֲרוֹת מִצְרַיִם, literally “nakedness / pudenda / genitals of Egypt,” is normally translated “to the shame of Egypt”—so also **Rahfs**--even though as Gray states, this translation “places on עֲרוֹת an unknown and improbable meaning, and produces a very trite conclusion.” (P. 346)

We say, No, עֲרוֹת does not mean “shame.” We think the statement should be understood in terms of **Leviticus 18**, where the noun עֲרוֹת occurs some 24 times, and refers basically to the sexual organs that “belong” to one’s covenanted mate, and are not to be uncovered to anyone else. Seen in this light, the phrase may mean that the uncovering of the sexual organs of the Egyptians, being carried off naked, is like a wife’s nakedness being exposed to others than her husband. The proud husband, Egypt, will experience his wife’s being exposed for all the world to view. Egypt is being raped! That is hardly a “trite conclusion.”

Slotki states, “For the practice of this indignity [of exposed buttocks], compare **2 Samuel 10:4**.” (P. 94)

And Chanun took David’s servants, and shaved off half their beard(s);  
and he cut their garments in half, as far as their buttocks,  
and he sent them forth.

[But this text does not describe David’s servants as being “naked”—it only states that their buttocks were exposed.]

As a background for this passage, with its depiction of Assyria capturing Egypt and Ethiopia, consider the bas-reliefs found in Sennacherib’s palace in Nineveh, with its depictions, evidently of the Israelite city of Lachish. The “Lachish Reliefs” can be seen on the Internet, in which many prisoners are pictured, mostly dressed, some naked. See our end-note 5. The city of Ashdod was some 30 miles from Lachish, and the experience of the two sites were remarkably similar, as they were both attacked by Assyrian armies. The bas-reliefs from Sennacherib’s palace in Nineveh are the closest thing we can get to an ancient picture of those terrifying events.

(continued...)

20:5<sup>25</sup> וַחֲתוּ וְבָשׁוּ

מִכּוֹשׁ מִבְּטָם

וּבְמִן־מִצְרַיִם תִּפְאָרְתָם:

And they<sup>26</sup> will be dismayed<sup>27</sup> and ashamed,

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<sup>24</sup>(...continued)

Also, see the numerous depictions of prisoners being taken away in the Pritchard's **Ancient Near East in Pictures**, some of whom are totally naked (in # 332, except for head-coverings!), while others are in various stages of nudity. Some of the priests offering sacrifice are depicted as totally naked.

Gray comments that “This explanation of Isaiah’s conduct [in **verses 3-4**] is only given three years after it had begun [yes—‘My servant Isaiah walked naked and barefoot (for) three years’]—what had happened in the interval?...

“Had Isaiah given no explanation to questions which his conduct must almost certainly have invoked? Did he himself attach no significance to conduct which he had practiced at the express direction of God (**verse 2**)? We may suppose that at first he explained it differently, making it perhaps significant of the exile that awaited Ashdod and Judah if they trust in [Egypt and Ethiopia].” (P. 345)

But, as we have stated, the text is completely silent on what happened during the interval, and this is only Gray’s “supposition.”

<sup>25</sup>Gray comments on **verses 5-6** that they depict “the effect which the captivity of Cush and Mitsraim [Ethiopia and Egypt] is to have on the Philistines and their Palestinian allies. *And they shall be dismayed (compare **Isaiah 8:9**) and ashamed because of Cush their hope (מִבְּטָם), to whom they looked (הִבִּיטוּ, **Isaiah 22:8, 11**) as a source of strength for help, and because of Mitsraim of whom they had made their boast, as being with all its irresistible might on their side; <sup>6</sup> and the inhabitants of the coast of Palestine shall say in that day, Behold thus is our hope become whither we fled for help to deliver ourselves from the king of Assyria; how then can we be saved?*

Alexander translates **verse 5**: “*And they shall be afraid and ashamed of Ethiopia and of Egypt their boast.*”

He comments that “This is the effect to be produced by the catastrophe just threatened.” (P. 369) Yes, how can an Egypt and Ethiopia carried off into Assyrian captivity / exile be of any help to those rebelling against Assyria?

<sup>26</sup>Slotki notes that the phrase “and they,” refers to “the people of Judah on witnessing the tragic plight of their neighbors upon whom they had relied for protection

(continued...)

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<sup>26</sup>(...continued)  
against Assyria.” (P. 94)

Watts has a different view, holding that “‘They’ refers to Palestinian rebels who had counted on the new Ethiopian dynasty to continue the policies of the kings of the lower Egyptian cities.” (P. 265)

In fact, the text is ambiguous as regards the identity of the “they,” i.e., whether it refers to the people of Judah or to the Palestinian rebels. But there is no doubt that it refers to people who had been counting of Egypt for help in resistance to Assyria, whether Jews or Philistines or others.

Watts continues: “Shabaka apparently sought a diplomatic accommodation with Assyria to replace the confrontation that had existed (compare **18:2** [which says nothing about a diplomatic accommodation with Assyria!]; this and Sargon’s report of a message from the Ethiopian king). During this period a refugee ruler from Ashdod who sought political asylum in Egypt was extradited at Assyria’s request. This policy effectively stripped Ashdod and Jerusalem of substantial support from that side in 712 B.C.E. During Shabaka’s lifetime Egypt kept peace with Assyria. However, when his successor came to the throne in 702 B.C.E, he promptly sent his brother Taharqa to aid Hezekiah against Assyria. He was decisively defeated at Eltekeh in 701 B.C.E. (K. A. Kitchen, **Intermediate Period in Egypt**, pp. 383-86). The policy of confrontation was again in force and it was only a matter of time before Assyria undertook a serious invasion of Egypt.” (P. 265)

See “Battle of Eltekeh” on the Internet, where opposing views of the outcome of the battle are presented, some agreeing with Kitchen’s view and others disagreeing. But what Watts calls a later “serious invasion of Egypt” is Esarhaddon’s capture of Memphis in 671. A **Wikipedia** article tells the story:

“Tiring of Egyptian interference in the Assyrian Empire, Esarhaddon decided to conquer Egypt. In 671 B.C.E. he crossed the Sinai Desert, and invaded and took Egypt with surprising ease and speed, driving its foreign Nubian /Kushite and Ethiopian rulers out and destroying the Kushite Empire in the process. Esarhaddon declared himself ‘king of Egypt, Libya, and Kush.’ Esarhaddon stationed a small army in northern Egypt and describes how ‘All Ethiopians (read Nubians / Kushites) I deported from Egypt, leaving not one left to do homage to me.’ He installed native Egyptian princes throughout the land to rule on his behalf.

“Under Ashurbanipal (669–627 B.C.E.), Assyrian domination spanned from the Caucasus Mountains (modern Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan) in the north to Nubia, Egypt, Libya and Arabia in the south, and from the East Mediterranean, Cyprus and Antioch in the west to Persia and the Caspian Sea in the east.

“Ultimately, Assyria conquered Babylonia, Chaldea, Elam, Media, Persia, Urartu Armenia), Phoenicia, Aramean Syria, Phrygia, the Neo-Hittite States, the Hurrian lands,

(continued...)

because of Ethiopia their expectation,<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>(...continued)

Arabia, Gutium, Israel, Judah, Samarra, Moab, Edom, Corduene, Cilicia, Mannea, and Cyprus, and defeated and / or exacted tribute from Scythia, Cimmeria, Lydia, Nubia, Ethiopia and others. At its height, the Empire encompassed the whole of the modern nations of Iraq, Syria, Egypt, Lebanon, Israel, Palestine, Jordan, Kuwait, Bahrain, Palestine and Cyprus, together with large swathes of Iran, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Sudan, Libya, Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan.

“Assyria now appeared stronger than ever. However, the long struggles pacifying the Babylonians, Chaldeans, Arameans and Elamites, the exertions undertaken in keeping the Medes, Scythians, Persians, Urartians and Cimmerians subjugated, and the constant campaigning over three centuries to control and expand its vast empire in all directions, had left Assyria materially, economically and physically exhausted. It had been drained of wealth and manpower; the devastated provinces could yield nothing to supply the needs of the imperial exchequer, it was difficult to find sufficient troops to garrison and effectively control the huge empire, and after the death of Ashurbanipal severe civil unrest broke out in Assyria itself, and the empire began to unravel.

“The Assyrian Empire was severely crippled following the death of Ashurbanipal in 627 BC—the nation and its empire descending into a prolonged and brutal series of civil wars involving three rival kings, Ashur-etil-ilani, Sin-shumu-lishir and Sin-shar-ishkun. Egypt's 26th Dynasty, which had been installed by the Assyrians as vassals, quietly detached itself from Assyria, although it was careful to retain friendly relations.” (9/26/2016)

<sup>27</sup>Alexander states that “the full sense of חֲתָוִי is, that they shall be confounded, filled with consternation, at the fate of those in whom they trusted for deliverance.” (P. 369)

<sup>28</sup>Where our Hebrew text has מִבְּטָחָם, “their expectation,” 1QIs<sup>a</sup> has מִבְּטָחָם, “their confidence.”

Alexander states that מִבְּטָחָם is that to which they *look* for help. It is used in the same sense in **Zechariah 9:5** [where it is stated that Eqron's expectation was put to shame].” (P. 369)

**Brown-Driver-Briggs** defines the noun as “expectation = object of hope or confidence (literally, *thing looked to*.” The noun is related to the root בָּטַח, which in both the piel and hiphil means “look.”

(continued...)

and because of Egypt, their beauty / glory!<sup>29</sup>

20:6<sup>30</sup> וְאָמַר יֹשֵׁב הָאִי הַזֶּה בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא

הִנֵּה-כָּה מִבְּטַנּוֹ אֲשֶׁר-נִסְנּוּ שָׁם לְעֶזְרָה

לְהִנָּצֵל מִפְּנֵי מֶלֶךְ אַשּׁוּר

וְאֵיךְ נִמְלֵט אֲנַחְנוּ:

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<sup>28</sup>(...continued)

Oswalt notes that נִבַּט, “to look upon,” “has the full range of meaning from merely ‘glancing at’ to ‘gazing upon.’ Here it carries the idea of ‘to look at with expectation of help’ (Isaiah 8:22; 63:5). Isaiah says they look in the wrong direction.” (P. 382)

<sup>29</sup>Alexander comments on the verse as a whole, that “Ashdod was attacked and taken, not as a town of the Philistines, but as a frontier post of great importance to both parties in the war. So far, then, as the Jews were interested in the war at all, they were interested in the fate of Ashdod, and the mention of this siege as one of the principal events of the campaign is altogether natural...The meaning of the verse is, that they who had relied on Egypt and its ally Ethiopia for aid against Assyria, whether Jews or Philistines, or both, should be confounded at beholding Egypt and Ethiopia themselves subdued.” (P. 369)

We say, Of course, the fall of Ashdod did not mean the fall of either Egypt or Ethiopia, or both. But it did mean that Egyptian / Ethiopian help for Ashdod had not materialized, and that now Assyria had direct access to Egypt, whereas before, Ashdod had stood in Assyria’s way. We take Isaiah to mean that with the fall of Ashdod, Egypt and Ethiopia are next. And as we have seen in footnote 26, in 671 the Assyrian king Esarhaddon captured Egypt’s capital city, Memphis, ousting the Ethiopian rulers, and Assyria took control of Egypt, a move later consolidated by his son and successor, Ashurbanipal. There would be no help for Judah coming from Egypt or Ethiopia!

<sup>30</sup>Alexander translates / comments on **verse 6**: “*And the inhabitant of this isle (or coast) shall say in that day, Behold, thus (or such) is our expectation, whither we fled for help, to be delivered from the presence of the king of Assyria. And how shall we (ourselves) escape? The disappointment described in the foregoing verse is now expressed by those who felt it. The argument is one a fortiori [with even stronger reason; with more convincing force]. If the protectors were subdued, what must become of the protected?*” (Pp. 369-70) We say, If the alleged protectors failed to protect Ashdod, how can others hope for their protection?

And an inhabitant<sup>31</sup> of this coast<sup>32</sup> will say on that day,<sup>33</sup>  
Look now—our confidence where we fled<sup>34</sup> for help  
to be delivered from before Assyria’s king—  
and how will we escape?<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>31</sup>Slotki comments that the singular “inhabitant” is a “collective noun for ‘inhabitants.’” (P. 94)

<sup>32</sup>Slotki’s translation has “coast-land,” and he comments that “this coast-land” means “Judah and all other countries in that region, though in its stricter sense it describes the land of the Philistines which adjoined the Mediterranean.” (P. 94)

Alexander states that יָם “here denotes, not Lower Egypt, or the Delta of the Nile...but the southeastern shore of the Mediterranean, here called *this coast*...in order to distinguish it from *that coast*, viz. Ethiopia and Egypt.” (P. 370)

Gray comments that “Sargon, not unnaturally, at a distance of 400 miles, groups together the inhabitants of Philistia, Judah, Edom, and Moab as *those that inhabit the coast*; but it is strange for a resident in Jerusalem to use.” (P. 347)

The phrase, in the mouth of a citizen of Jerusalem would mean, we think, “the Philistines,” and perhaps “the Phoenicians.”

Oswalt notes that “The reference to ‘this coast’ has been puzzling to commentators. The reference is primarily to Philistia, whose only hope was Egypt. It is not necessary to think that Isaiah included Judah in the coastal region (although far-off Assyria did). The point is that those who were trusting Egypt would be ashamed. Why should Judah join this party?” (P. 382)

<sup>33</sup>**Rahlfs** has no translation for the Hebrew text’s phrase “on that day.”

<sup>34</sup>Where our Hebrew text has נִסַּנּוּ, “we fled,” 1QIs<sup>a</sup> has נִסַּמְךָ, “we leaned.”

<sup>35</sup>Slotki comments “If the protecting nations could not withstand the onslaught of Assyria, what hope is there for the peoples who relied on their protection? *How shall we escape?* The pronoun *we* is emphatic in the text.” (P. 94)

Yes. The statement could have been just וְאֵיךְ נִמְלֵט, “and how shall we escape?” But the author has added the pronoun “we” at the end, to make the statement more emphatic: וְאֵיךְ נִמְלֵט אֲנַחְנוּ, “and how shall we escape, we?”

Oswalt comments on **verses 5-6** that “As Ashdod had looked to Egypt and been betrayed, so will all the other nations of the Levant [the region on the eastern coast of

(continued...)

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<sup>35</sup>(...continued)

the Mediterranean Sea north of the Arabian Peninsula and south of Turkey, usually including the area of Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, and Syria]. Egypt's shame will be theirs. She had not been strong enough to defy Assyria's demand for Yamani...

"All these events pointed to the harsh truth that whenever Assyria came for her, she would not be able to save herself. Again, over-literalism is to be avoided. Isaiah is not saying when Egypt will go into captivity, or precisely what will precede or follow that event. He is only saying that Egypt *will* fail and that, for that reason, it is foolish to put any trust in her. Why then, asks Isaiah, would we want to trust Egypt? It can only end in shame as it did for Yamani. Why look to Egypt's fading beauty when we can look to the glory of God?" (P. 387)

Watts explains that "The grim narrative of **chapter 20** with its disturbing acted sign brings the beautiful vision back to stark reality. Jerusalem's leaders have agreed to join the so-called Ashdod rebellion of 714-12 B.C.E. [so, at least, Watts claims; but is there real evidence for this? Not in this chapter]. This means that they have cast their lot with the Delta kings of Egypt (22nd, 23rd, and 24th dynasties) against Ethiopia and Assyria. The prophet's protest underscores a fact well known to the readers of the **[Book of Isaiah]**: this flies in the face of the expressed plan of Yahweh...

"Isaiah's sign is intended to counter what is perceived to be an actual or potential royal policy which depends on Egyptian support, that is from the Delta kings, against Assyria. Ashdod's messengers had visited Jerusalem and Hezekiah was tempted to join the revolt [but there is no mention of Ashdod's messengers in this chapter].

"Isaiah's protest is thoroughly consistent with his counsel to Ahaz (**Isaiah 7:4**) and his evaluation of the Assyrian's destiny (**Isaiah 7:17; 10:5-6**). This is no private advice to the king and his counselors, but a public demonstration intended to catch the attention of the nation. It is not a prediction of a specific event, but an evaluation of Egypt's long-term inability and lack of will to counter Assyrian pressure.

"But Judah stubbornly leaned toward an anti-Assyrian and pro-Egyptian (i.e., the cities of the Delta, not the Ethiopian dynasty) stance which was short-sighted and unrealistic. It involved a fateful miscalculation of Assyria's power and will. Hezekiah's ministers had involved Judah in the Ashdod rebellion from the very beginning of his reign [perhaps—but nothing is said concerning this in **chapter 20**]. It broke out fully by 714 B.C.E. and was suppressed by Sargon's forces in 712 [711] B.C.E...Judah apparently lent its support in the early stages but sought Assyria's amnesty before the fighting started. Of course, hopes for Egyptian support were fruitless. Egypt was being overrun by Ethiopian forces friendly to Assyria.

"Through the following years Shabaka (717-702 B.C.E.) maintained correct, almost friendly relations with Assyria, thus gaining external peace for Egypt during his reign (Kitchen, p. 380)." (Pp. 265-66)

(continued...)

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<sup>35</sup>(...continued)

Some 30 years later, Esarhaddon's (Sargon's son, who followed him as Ruler) army entered Egypt, and succeeded in capturing Memphis, Egypt's capital, causing Tirhaqa to flee to Upper Egypt. Shortly after Esarhaddon's death (some 3 years later), Egypt rebelled, but the rebellion was cut short by his son and successor, Ashurbanipal, as the Assyrian empire continued to expand. Thus Isaiah's prediction was fulfilled. Egypt was no dependable source of help!



1.

## **Ashdod, Modern and Ancient**

“Ashdod is today the sixth-largest city and the largest port in Israel accounting for 60% of the country's imported goods. Ashdod is located in the Southern District of the country, on the Mediterranean coast where it is situated between Tel Aviv to the north, 20 miles away) and Ashkelon to the south, 12 miles away). Jerusalem is 33 miles to the east. The city is also an important regional industrial center.

“Modern Ashdod covers the territory of two ancient twin towns, one inland and one on the coast, which were for most of their history two separate entities, connected though by close ties with each other. This article is dealing with both these historic towns and other ancient sites now located within the territory of modern Ashdod.

“The first documented urban settlement at Ashdod dates to the Canaanite culture of the 17th century B.C.E., making the city one of the oldest in the world. Ashdod is mentioned some 23 times in the **Bible [Joshua 11:22; 13:3; 15:46, 47; 1 Samuel 5:1, 3, 5, 6, 6, 7; 6:17; 2 Chronicles 26:6, 6; Nehemiah 4:7; 13:23, 24; Isaiah 20:1; Jeremiah 25:20; Amos 1:8; 3:9; Zephaniah 2:4 and 9:6]**. During its pre-1956 history the city was settled by Philistines, Israelites, colonists coming in the wake of Alexander the Great's conquests, Romans and Byzantines, Arabs, Crusaders, and Ottoman Turks.

“Modern Ashdod was established in 1956 on the sand hills near the site of the ancient town, and incorporated as a city in 1968, with a land-area of approximately 23 square miles. Being a planned city, expansion followed a main development plan, which facilitated traffic and prevented air pollution in the residential areas, despite population growth. According to the Israel Central Bureau of Statistics, Ashdod had a population of 217,959 in 2014, with an area of 18.240 square miles. [Take a camera tour of beautiful modern Ashdod on the Internet!]

“The site of Ashdod in the Bronze Age and Iron Ages was at a tell [A ‘Tel’ (the Israeli spelling) is an archaeological term, meaning a mound underneath which lie the ruins of previous settlements] just south of the modern city. It was excavated by archaeologists in nine seasons between 1962 and 1972 (David Noel Freedman and Moshe Dothan).

“The earliest major habitation in Ashdod dates to the 17th century B.C.E., when the acropolis of the tell was fortified. Ashdod is first mentioned in written documents from Late Bronze Age Ugarit, which indicate that the city was a center of export for dyed woolen purple fabric and garments. At the end of the 13th century B.C.E. the Sea Peoples conquered and destroyed Ashdod. By the beginning of the 12th century B.C.E., the Philistines, generally thought to have been one of the Sea Peoples, ruled the city. During their reign, the city prospered and was a member of the Philistine Pentapolis (i.e. five cities; the others were Ashkelon, Ekron, Gath, and Gaza), which included Ashkelon and Gaza on the coast and Ekron and Gath farther inland, in addition to Ashdod.

“In 950 B.C.E. Ashdod was destroyed during Pharaoh Siamun's conquest of the region. The city was not rebuilt until at least 815 B.C.E.

“Asdûdu [Ashdod] led the revolt of Philistines, Judeans, Edomites, and Moabites against Assyria after expulsion of king Ahimiti, whom Sargon had installed instead of his brother Azuri. Gath belonged to the kingdom of Ashdod at that time. Assyrian king Sargon II's commander-in-chief (*turtanu*), whom the **King James Bible** calls simply "Tartan," **Isaiah 20:1**, regained control of Ashdod in 712 / 711 B.C.E. and forced the usurper Yamani to flee. Sargon's general destroyed the city and exiled its residents, including some Israelites who were subsequently settled in Media and Elam.

“Mitinti was king at the time of Sargon's son Sennacherib (reigned from 705–681 B.C.E.), and Akhimilki in the reign of Sennacherib's son Esarhaddon (reigned from 681–669 B.C.E.).

“Psamtik I of Egypt (reigned from 664–610 B.C.E.) is reported to have besieged the great city Azotus [Greek name for Ashdod] for twenty-nine years (**Herodotus**, ii. 157); the biblical references to the remnant of Ashdod (**Jeremiah 25:20**; compare **Zephaniah 2:4**) are interpreted as allusions to this event.

“The city absorbed another blow in 605 B.C.E., when Nebuchadnezzar conquered it.

“In 539 B.C.E. the city was rebuilt by the Persians. In 332 B.C.E. it was conquered in the wars of Alexander the Great.

“In the **Book of Nehemiah**, the Ashdodites seem to represent the whole nation of the Philistines in the sixth century B.C.E., the speech of Ashdod (which half of the children from mixed families are described as adopting) would simply be the general Philistine dialect. Hugo Winckler explains the use of that name by the fact that Ashdod was the nearest of the Philistine cities to Jerusalem.

“In the **Hebrew Bible** there are biblical episodes referencing Ashdod but they remain uncorroborated by archaeological finds:

“Upon Joshua's conquest of the Promised Land, Ashdod was allotted to the Tribe of Judah (**Book of Joshua 15:46**).

“In **1 Samuel 6:17** Ashdod is mentioned among the principal Philistine cities. After capturing the Ark of the covenant from the Israelites, the Philistines took it to Ashdod and placed it in the temple of Dagon. The next morning Dagon was found prostrate before the Ark; on being restored to his place, he was on the following morning again found prostrate and broken. The people of Ashdod were smitten with boils; a plague of mice was sent over the land (**1 Samuel 6:5**).

“According to the **Bible**, during the 10th century B.C.E. Ashdod became, along with all the kingdom of Philistia, a patronage area of the Kingdom of Israel under the control of King David.

“The capture of the city by King Uzziah of Judah shortly after 815 B.C.E. is mentioned in **2 Chronicles 26:6** and in the **Book of Zechariah 9:6**, speaking of the false Jews.

“In **Nehemiah 13:23–24**, some 5th century B.C.E. residents of Jerusalem are said to have married women from Ashdod, and half of the children of these unions were reportedly unable to understand Hebrew; instead, they spoke "the language of Ashdod."

“In the Hellenistic period, following the conquest of Alexander the Great, the Hellenized city changed its name to the more Greek-sounding Azotus, and prospered until the Hasmonean Revolt. During the rebellion Judas Maccabeus "took it, and laid it waste" (**Antiquities of the Jews** Book 12, 8:6) His brother Jonathan conquered it again in 147 B.C.E. and destroyed the temple of Dagon of biblical fame **Antiquities** Book 13, 4:4; **1 Samuel 5:1-5**). During the rule of Alexander Jannæus, Ashdod was part of his territory (**Antiquities** Book 13, 15:4).

“In the Roman and Byzantine periods, after the destruction wreaked during the succession wars between Hyrcanus II and Aristobulus II, Pompey restored the independence of Azotus, as he did with all Hellenizing coastal cities (**Antiquities** Book 14, 4:4). A few years later, in 55 B.C.E., after more fighting, Roman general Gabinius helped rebuild Ashdod and several other cities left without protective walls (**Antiquities** Book 14, 5:2). In 30 B.C.E. Ashdod came under the rule of King Herod, who then bequeathed it to his sister Salome (**Antiquities** Book 17, 8:1). By the time of the First Jewish–Roman War (66-70 C.E.), there must have been a large enough Jewish presence in Ashdod for Vespasian to feel compelled to place a garrison in the city.

“Despite its location four miles from the coast, Ptolemy (about 90–168 C.E.) described it as a maritime city, as did Josephus in **Antiquities** Book 13, 15:4. The same Josephus though describes Ashdod as "in the inland parts" (**Antiquities** Book 14, 4:4). This curious contradiction may refer to Ashdod's control of a separate harbor, called Azotus Paralios, or Ashdod-on-the-Sea / Coast. The landlocked city was called by the Romans Hippinos, "of the horsemen", and by the Greeks until late in the medieval period, Azotus mesogaios or "inland Azotus."

“During the Byzantine period, the port city overshadowed its inland counterpart in size and importance. The 6th-century Madaba Map shows both under their respective names.

“In the **New Testament**, the 1st century C.E. **Book of Acts** refers to Azotus as the place in which Philip the Evangelist reappeared after he converted the Ethiopian eunuch to Christianity. Philip preached the gospel throughout the area until he reached Caesarea, about 56 miles to the north.

“In the early Muslim period the prominence of Hellenized, then Christian Azotus continued until the 7th century, when it came under Muslim rule.” (**Wikipedia**, 9/21/2016)

2.

## **Sargon II and His Son Sennacherib**

### **Excerpts from Pritchard's Ancient Near Eastern Texts, Pp. 284-88**

“Property of Sargon, etc., king of Assyria, etc. conqueror of Samaria and of the entire country of Israel who despoiled Ashdod...who declared Hanno, king of Gaza, as booty...

“At the beginning of my royal rule, I...the town of the Samaritans I besieged, conquered...I led away as prisoners 27,290 inhabitants of it and equipped from among them soldiers to man 50 chariots for my royal corps...The town I rebuilt better than it was before and settled therein people from countries which I myself had conquered. I placed an officer of mine as governor over them and imposed upon them tribute as is customary for Assyrian citizens...the tribute of the former king, Hanno, king of Gaza and also Sib'e, the turtan of Egypt (Mu-tsu-ri), set out from Rapihu against me to deliver a decisive battle. I defeated them; Sib'e ran away, afraid when he only heard the noise of my approaching army, and has not been seen again. Hanno I captured personally...

“Iamani from Ashdod, afraid of my armed force (literally, 'weapons'), left his wife and children and fled to the frontier of Musru [Egypt] which belongs to Meluhha (i.e. Ethiopia) and hid (literally 'stayed') there like a thief. I installed an officer of mine as governor over his entire large country and its prosperous inhabitants, thus aggrandizing again the territory belonging to Ashur, the King of the Gods...

“I conquered and sacked the towns Shihuhtu and Samaria, and all Israel (literally, 'Omri-Land'). I caught, like a fish, the Greek (Ionians) who live on islands amidst the Western Sea...

“In the second year of my rule, Ilubidi, from Hamath...a large army he brought together at the town Qarqar and, forgetting the oaths which they had sworn...the cities of Arpad, Simirra, Damascus and Samaria revolted against me...

“I inflicted a defeat upon them (i.e. Hanno and Sib'e) upon an oracle-order given by my Lord Ashur, and Sib'e, like a sipa (i.e. shepherd) whose flock has been stolen, fled alone and disappeared...I brought Hanno with me in fetters to my city Ashur. I destroyed Rapihu, tore down its walls and burned it. I led away as prisoners 9,033 inhabitants with their numerous possessions...

“Ia'ubidi from Hamath, a commoner without claim to the throne, a cursed Hittite, schemed to become king of Hamath, induced the cities Arvad, Simirra, Damascus and Samaria to desert me, made them collaborate and fitted out an army. I called up the masses of the soldiers of Ashur and besieged him and his warriors in Qarqar, his favorite city. I conquered it and burnt it. Himself I flayed; the rebels I killed in their cities and established again peace and harmony...

“In the fifth year of my rule, Pisiri of Carchemish broke the oath sworn by the great Gods and wrote messages to Midas, king of Muski, full of hostile plans against Assyria. I lifted my hands in prayer to my Lord Ashur with the result that I quickly made

him, and also his family, surrender (literally 'come out') of Carchemish, all in fetters and with the gold, silver and his personal possessions. And the rebellious inhabitants of Carchemish who had sided with him, I led away as prisoners and brought them to Assyria. I formed from among them a contingent of 50 chariots, 200 men on horseback and 3,000 foot soldiers and added it to my royal corps. In the city of Carchemish I then settled inhabitants of Assyria and imposed upon their neck the yoke of Ashur, my Lord...

"Upon a trust-inspiring oracle given by my Lord Ashur, I crushed the tribes of Tamud, Ibadidi, Marsimanu, and Haiapa, the Arabs who live, far away, in the desert and who know neither overseers nor officials and who had not yet brought their tribute to any king. I deported their survivors and settled them in Samaria...

"Azuri, king of Ashdod, had schemed not to deliver tribute any more and sent messages full of hostilities against Assyria to the kings living in his neighborhood. On account of the misdeed which he thus committed, I abolished his rule over the inhabitants of his country and made Ahimiti, his younger brother, king over them. But these Hittites, always planning treachery, hated his (Ahimati's) reign and elevated to rule over them a Greek who, without claim to the throne, knew, just as they themselves, no respect for authority. In a sudden rage I marched quickly—even in my state-chariot and only with my cavalry which never, even in friendly territory, leaves my side—against Ashdod, his royal residence, and I besieged and conquered the cities Ashdod, Gath and Asdudimmu...I placed an officer of mine as governor over them and declared them Assyrian citizens and they bore as such my yoke...

"But this Greek heard about the advance of my expedition, from afar, and he fled into the territory of musru [Egypt]—which now belongs to Ethiopia—and his hiding place could not be detected...I reorganized the administration of these cities and settled therein people from the regions of the east which I had conquered personally...The king of Ethiopia... did hear, even (that) far away, of the might of Ashur, Nebo (and) Marduk. The awe-inspiring glamor of my kingship blinded him and terror overcame him. He threw him (i.e. the Greek) in fetters, shackles and iron bands, and they brought him to Assyria, a long journey.

"In the region of the town Nachal-mutsur...I made my army march the road towards sunset...the sheik of the town Laban...Shilkanni, king of Musri, who...the terror-inspiring glamor of Ashur, my Lord, overwhelmed him and he brought as tamartu-presents 12 fine (literally 'big') horses from Musri which have not their equal in this country...

"Aziru, king of Ashdod...on account of this crime...from...Ahimiti...his younger brother over them...I made (him) ruler...tribute ...like those of the former kings, I imposed upon him. But these accursed Hittites conceived the idea of not delivering the tribute and started a rebellion against their ruler; they expelled him...la-ma-ni a Greek, commoner without claim to the throne to be king over them, they made sit down on the very throne of his former master and they...their city of (or 'for') the attack...its neighborhood, a moat they prepared of a depth of 20 + x cubits...it even reached the underground water, in order to...Then to the rulers of Palestine, Judah, Edom, Moab

and those who live on islands and bring tribute and tamartu-gifts to my Lord Ashur—he spread countless evil lies to alienate them from me, and also sent bribes to Pir'u, king of Musru—a potentate, incapable to save them—and asked him to be an ally. But I, Sargon, the rightful ruler, devoted to the pronouncements uttered by Nebo and Marduk, carefully observing the orders of Ashur, led my army over the Tigris and the Euphrates, at the peak of their flood, the spring flood, as if it be dry ground. This Greek, however, their king who had put his trust in his own power and therefore did not bow to my Divinely ordained rulership, heard about the approach of my expedition while I was still far away, and the splendor of my Lord Ashur overwhelmed him and...he fled...

“Property of Sargon, etc. the subduer of the country Judah which is far away, the uprooter of Hamath, the ruler of which—lau' bidi—he captured personally...

[All of this is background for our understanding of **Isaiah 20**.]

Sennacherib (704-681 B.C.E.) [Sargon's son]

“In my third campaign I marched against Hatti. Luli, king of Sidon, whom the terror-inspiring glamor of my lordship had overwhelmed, fled far overseas and perished. The awe-inspiring splendor of the ‘Weapon’ of Ashur, my Lord, overwhelmed his strong cities, such as Great Sidon, Little Sidon, Bit-Zitti, Zaribru, Mahal-liba, Ushu (i.e. the mainland settlement of Tyre, Akzib and Akko, all his fortress cities, walled and well provided with feed and water for his garrisons, and they bowed in submission to my feet. I installed Ethba'al (Tubalu) upon the throne to be their king and imposed upon him tribute due to me as his overlord to be paid annually without interruption.

“As to all the kings of Amurru—Menahem...Tuba'lu from Sidon, Abdili'ti...Urumilki from Byblos, Mitinti from Ashdod, Buduli from Beth-Ammon, Kammusun-adbi from Moab and Aiarammu from Edom, they brought sumptuous gifts and fourfold—their heavy tamartu-presents to me and kissed my feet. Sidquia, however, king of Ashkelon, who did not bow to my yoke, I deported and sent to Assyria, his family-Gods, himself, his wife, his children, his brothers, all the male descendants of his family. I set Sharruludari, son of Ahkibtu, their former king, over the inhabitants of Ashkelon and imposed upon him the payment of tribute and of katru-presents due to me as overlord—and he now pulls the straps of my yoke.

“In the continuation of my campaign I besieged Beth-Dagon, Joppa, Banai-Barqa, Azuru, cities belonging to Sidqia who did not bow to my feet quickly enough; I conquered them and carried their spoils away. The officials, the patricians and the common people of Ekron—who had thrown Padi, their king, into fetters because he was loyal to his solemn oath sworn by the God Ashur, and had handed him over to Hezekiah, the Jew—and Hezekiah held him in prison, unlawfully, as if Padi be an enemy—had become afraid and had called for help upon the kings of Egypt (Musuri) and the bowmen, the chariot corps and the cavalry of the king of Ethiopia (Meluhha), an army beyond counting—and they actually had come to their assistance. In the plain of Eltekeh, their battle lines were drawn up against me and they sharpened their weapons. Upon a trust-inspiring oracle given by Ashur my Lord, I fought with them and inflicted a defeat upon them. In the melee of the battle, I personally captured the Egyptian

charioteers with their princes and also the charioteers of the king of Ethiopia. I besieged Eltekeh and Timnah, conquered them and carried their spoils away. I assaulted Ekron and killed the officials and patricians who had committed the crime and hung their bodies on poles surrounding the city. The common citizens who were guilty of minor crimes, I considered prisoners of war. The rest of them, those who were not accused of crimes and misbehavior, I released. I made Padi, their king, come from Jerusalem and set him as their lord on the throne, imposing upon him the tribute due to me as overlord.

“As to Hezekiah, the Jew, he did not submit to my yoke. I laid siege to 46 of his strong cities, walled forts and to the countless villages in their vicinity, and conquered them by means of well-stamped earth-ramps, and battering-rams brought thus near to the walls, combined with the attack by foot soldiers, using mines, breeches, as well as sapper [military engineers, who build bridges, etc. before an advancing army] work. I drove out of them 200,150 people, young and old, male and female, horses, mules, donkeys, camels, big and small cattle beyond counting, and considered them booty. Himself I made a prisoner in Jerusalem, his royal residence, like a bird in a cage. I surrounded him with earthwork in order to molest those who were leaving his city’s gate. His towns which I had plundered, I took away from his country and gave them over to Mitinti, king of Ashdod, Padi, king of Ekron, and Silibel, king of Gaza. Thus I reduced his country, but I increased the tribute and the katru-presents due to me as his overlord which I imposed later upon him beyond the former tribute, to be delivered annually. Hezekiah himself, whom the terror-inspiring splendor of my lordship had overwhelmed and whose irregular and elite troops which he had brought into Jerusalem, his royal residence, in order to strengthen it, had deserted him, did send me, later, to Nineveh, my lordly city, together with 30 talents of gold, 800 talents of silver, precious stones, antimony, large cuts of red stone, couches inlaid with ivory, nimeru-chairs inlaid with ivory, elephant-hides, ebony-wood, box-wood and all kinds of valuable treasures, his own daughters, concubines, male and female musicians. In order to deliver the tribute and to do obeisance as a slave he sent his personal messenger.

“And Luli, king of Sidon, was afraid to fight me and fled to the country Cyprus, which is an island, in the midst of the sea, and sought refuge there. For even in this land, he met infamous death before the awe-inspiring splendor of the ‘Weapon’ of my Lord Ashur. I installed Ethba’al upon his royal throne and imposed upon him the tribute due to me as his overlord. I laid waste the large district of Judah and made the overbearing and proud Hezekiah, its king, bow in submission.”

[For those who consider the biblical materials non-historical (“it’s all fairy-tales!”), these documents from the ancient Near East demonstrate how deeply imbedded in the history of the ancient Near East they truly are—this king Sargon, mentioned only once in the **Bible**, and his attack on Ashdod, are not imaginary! Neither is his son Sennacherib’s attack on Jerusalem!]

### 3. **Sargon II, King of Assyria**

“Sargon II was a son of Tiglath-Pileser III and appears to have seized the throne from his brother, Shalmaneser V in a violent coup. Sargon was already middle-aged when he came to the throne, and was assisted by his son, the crown prince, Sennacherib.

“Sargon was beset with widespread rebellions at the beginning of his rule. Marduk-apla-iddina II, a chieftain of the Chaldean tribes in the marshes of the south, declared himself king of Babylon and was crowned king in 721 B.C.E. In 720 B.C.E., Sargon and Marduk-apla-iddina met in battle on the plains east of Babylon. Marduk-apla-iddina was supported by Elam. The Elamite troops were able to push back the Assyrian army, and he retained control of the south and the title of king of Babylon.

“In 717 B.C.E., the Syro-Hittite city of Carchemish on the Upper Euphrates rebelled. Carchemish was a small kingdom situated at an important Euphrates crossing. Sargon violated existing treaties in attacking the city, but with the wealth seized was able to continue to fund his army.

“In 716 B.C.E. he moved against the Mannaeans, where the ruler Aza, son of Iranzu, had been deposed by Ullusunu with the help of the Urartuans. Sargon took the capital Izirtu, and stationed troops in Parsuash (the original home of the Persian tribe, on lake Urmia) and Kar-Nergal (Kishesim). He built new bases in Media as well, the main one being Harhar which he renamed Kar-Sharrukin. In 715 B.C.E., others were to follow: Kar-Nabu, Kar-Sin and Kar-Ishtar--all named after Babylonian Gods and resettled by Assyrian subjects.

“The eighth campaign of Sargon against Urartu in 714 B.C.E. is well known from a letter from Sargon to the God Ashur (found in the town of Assur [capital city of the Old Assyrian Empire (2025–1750 B.C.E.), Middle Assyrian Empire (1365–1050 B.C.E.).

“Bas-reliefs found in the palace of Dur-Sharrukin (now in the Louvre, in Paris) show the difficulties of the terrain: the war-chariots had to be dismantled and carried by soldiers (with the king still in the chariot); the letter describes how paths had to be cut into the intractable forests. The campaign was probably motivated by the fact that the Urartians had been weakened by incursions of the Cimmerians, a nomadic steppe tribe. One Urartian army had been completely annihilated, and the general Qaqqadanu taken prisoner.

“After reaching Lake Urmia, he turned east and entered Zikirtu and Andia on the Caspian slopes of the Caucasus. When news reached him that king Rusas I of Urartu was moving against him, he turned back to Lake Urmia in forced marches and defeated a Urartian army in a steep valley of the Uaush (probably the Sahend, east of Lake Urmia, or further to the south, in Mannaea country), a steep mountain that reached the clouds and whose flanks were covered by snow. The battle is described as the usual carnage, but King Rusas managed to escape. The horses of his chariot had been killed by Assyrian spears, forcing him to ride a mare in order to get away, very unbecoming for a king.



“Sargon plundered the fertile lands at the southern and western shore of Lake Urmia, felling orchards and burning the harvest. In the royal resort of Ulhu, the wine-cellar of the Urartian kings was plundered; wine was scooped up like water. The Assyrian army then plundered Sangibuti and marched north to Van without meeting resistance, the people having retreated to their castles or fled into the mountains, having been warned by fire-signals. Sargon claims to have destroyed 430 empty villages.

“After reaching Lake Van, Sargon left Urartu via Uaiaish. In Hubushkia he received the tribute of the "Nairi" lands. While most of the army returned to Assyria, Sargon went on to sack the Urartian temple of the God Haldi and his wife Bagbartu at Musasir (Ardini). The loot must have been impressive; its description takes up fifty columns in the letter to Ashur. More than one ton of gold and five tons of silver fell into the hands of the Assyrians; 334,000 objects in total. A relief from Dur-Sharrukin depicted the sack of Musasir as well (which fell into the Tigris in 1846 when the archaeologist Paul-Émile Botta was transporting his artifacts to Paris). Musasir was annexed. Sargon claims to have lost only one charioteer, two horsemen and three couriers on this occasion. King Rusa was said to be despondent when he heard of the loss of Musasir, and fell ill. According to the imperial annals, he took his own life with his own iron sword.

“In 713 B.C.E., Sargon stayed at home; his troops took, among others, Karalla, Tabal and Cilicia. Persian and Mede rulers offered tribute. In 711 B.C.E., Gurgum was conquered. An uprising in the Philistine city of Ashdod, supported by Judah, Moab, Edom and Egypt, was suppressed, and Philistia became an Assyrian province.

“Under his rule, the Assyrians completed the defeat of the Kingdom of Israel, capturing Samaria after a siege of three years and exiling the inhabitants. This became the basis of the legends of the ‘Lost Ten Tribes.’ According to the **Bible**, other people were brought to Samaria, the Samaritans, under his predecessor Shalmaneser V (**2 Kings 18**). Sargon's name actually appears in the **Bible** only once, in **Isaiah 20:1** which records the Assyrian capture of Ashdod in 711 B.C.E.

“In 710 B.C.E. Sargon felt safe enough in his rule to move against his Babylonian arch-enemy Marduk-apla-iddina II. One army moved against Elam and its new king Shutur-Nahhunte II to prevent them from supplying aid to Marduk-apla-iddina; the other, under Sargon himself, proceeded against Babylon. Sargon first moved against Dūr-Athara which he renamed Dūr-Nabû and made the capital of the new province of Gambalu. He then laid siege to Babylon, and Marduk-apla-iddina II fled. Sargon claimed that he entered Babylon at the request of the priests and civil servants. Babylon yielded to Sargon and he was proclaimed king of Babylonia in 710 B.C.E., thus restoring the dual monarchy of Babylonia and Assyria. He remained in Babylon for three years; in 709 B.C.E., he led the new-year procession as king of Babylon.

“Marduk-apla-iddina attempted to flee to Elam but the king forbade him entry. Taking hostages from Ur, Uruk, and other towns, he went to his ancestral city of Dūr-Jakin which he further fortified by adding to the walls and digging a canal from the Euphrates to flood the surrounding area. In 709 B.C.E. Sargon's troops gained a

victory outside the city but could not take Dūr-Jakin, where Marduk-apla-iddina had fled. A negotiated settlement was reached whereby Sargon would spare Marduk-apla-iddina's life provided the city walls were demolished. It is not clear whether they were, since two years later, Sargon returned to take them down himself.

“Sargon had his son, crown-prince Sennacherib, married to the Aramean noblewoman Naqi'a, and stayed in the south to pacify the Aramaic and Chaldean tribes of the lower Euphrates as well as the Suti nomads. Some areas in Elam were occupied as well.

“In 710 B.C.E., the seven Greek kings of Ia' (Cyprus) had accepted Assyrian sovereignty; in 709 B.C.E., Midas, king of Phrygia, beset by the nomadic Cimmerians, submitted to Assyrian rule and in 708 B.C.E., Kummuhu (Commagene) became an Assyrian province. Assyria was at the apogee of its power. Urartu had almost succumbed to the Cimmerians, Elam was weakened, Marduk-apla-iddina II was powerless, and the Egyptian influence in the Levant had been thwarted.

“Dur-Sharrukin ("Fort Sargon") was constructed as a new capital city by Sargon II shortly after he came to the throne in 721 B.C.E. The city measured about a square mile in area. It was enclosed within a great wall of unbaked brick pierced by seven gates. Protective genies were placed on either side of these entrances to act as guardians. The palace was richly decorated with relief-carved stone slabs. The land in the environs of the town was taken under cultivation, and olive groves were planted to increase Assyria's deficient oil production. The town was of rectangular layout and measured almost 2 miles by a little over 1 mile. The length of the walls was 16,280 Assyrian units, corresponding to the numerical value of Sargon's name. The town was partly settled by prisoners of war and deportees under the control of Assyrian officials, who had to ensure they were paying sufficient respect to the Gods and the king. The court moved to Dur-Sharrukin in 706 B.C.E., although it was not completely finished.

“In 705 BC, Sargon fell while driving the Cimmerians from Ancient Iran, where they were attacking Sargon's Persian and Median vassals. They later ravaged the kingdoms of Urartu and Phrygia, before being finally subdued by the Assyrians. Sargon was succeeded by his son Sennacherib.” (**Wikipedia**, 9/21/2016)

4.

#### **Esarhaddon of Assyria**

“Esarhaddon was a king of the Neo-Assyrian Empire who reigned 681–669 B.C.E. He was the youngest son of Sennacherib and the West Semitic queen Naqi'a (Zakitu), Sennacherib's second wife.

“When, despite being the youngest son, Esarhaddon was named successor by his father, his elder brothers tried to discredit him. Oracles had named him as the person to free the exiles and rebuild Babylon, the destruction of which by Sennacherib was felt to have been sacrilegious. Esarhaddon remained crown prince, but was forced into exile at an unknown place beyond Hanilgalbat Mitanni), that is, beyond the Euphrates, most likely somewhere in what is now southeastern Turkey.

“Sennacherib was murdered in 681 B.C.E., supposedly at the instigation of Esarhaddon, but that seems hardly likely, as he was not in a situation to exploit unrest arising from the death of his father. The biblical account is that Esarhaddon's brothers killed their father after the failed attempt to capture Jerusalem and fled to the land of Ararat (**2 Kings 19:37**). He returned to the capital of Nineveh in forced marches and defeated his rival brothers in six weeks of civil war. He was formally declared king in the spring of 681 B.C.E. His brothers fled the land, and their followers and families were put to death. In the same year he began the rebuilding of Babylon, including the well-known Esagila and the Ekur at Nippur (structures sometimes identified with the Tower of Babel). The statues of the Babylonian Gods were restored and returned to the city. To appear not too biased in favor of Babylonia, he ordered the reconstruction of the Assyrian sanctuary of Esharra in Ashur as well. Foreigners were forbidden to enter the temple. Both buildings were dedicated almost on the same date, the second year of his reign.

“The first military campaigns of Esarhaddon were directed against nomadic tribes of southern Mesopotamia, the Dakkuri and Gambulu, who had been harassing the peasants. In 679 B.C.E., the Cimmerians, who had already killed his grandfather Sargon II, reappeared in Cilicia and Tabal under their new ruler Teushpa. Esarhaddon defeated them near Hubushna (Hupisna), and defeated the rebellious inhabitants of Hilakku as well. The Cimmerians withdrew to the west, where, with Scythian and Urartuan help, they were to destroy the kingdom of Phrygia in 676 B.C.E.

“The Sidonian king Abdi-Milkutti, who had risen up against the Assyrian king, was defeated in 677 B.C.E. and beheaded. The town of Sidon was destroyed and rebuilt as Kar-Ashur-aha-iddina, the "Harbor of Esarhaddon." The population was deported to Assyria. A share of the plunder went to the loyal king of rival Tyre, Baal I, himself an Assyrian puppet. The partly conserved text of a treaty with Tyre mentions the kings of Judah, Edom, Moab, Gaza, Ashkelon, Ekron, Byblos, Arvad, Samsi-muruna, Ammon, Ashdod, ten kings from the coast of the sea, and ten kings from the middle of the sea (usually identified with Cyprus), as Assyrian allies.

“In 676 B.C.E., Esarhaddon took the towns of Sissu and Kundu in the Taurus Mountains. The Mannaeans, the Scythians under their king Ishpakaia, and the Gutians of the Zagros proved to be a nuisance as well, as is attested by numerous oracle-texts.

The Mannaeans, former vassals of the Assyrians, were no longer restricted to the area around Lake Urmia, but had spread into Zamua, where they interrupted the horse trade between Parsuash and Assyria and refused to pay further tribute. After the fall of Phrygia, a daughter of Esarhaddon was wedded to the Scythian prince Partatua of Sakasene in order to improve relations with the nomads. The Medes under Khshathrita Kashtariti had been the target of a campaign as well, the date of which is unclear (possibly before 676 B.C.E.). Later, Assyrian hosts reached the border of the "salt-desert" near the mountain Bikni, that is, near Teheran. A number of fortresses secured the Zagros: Bit-Parnakki, Bit-kari and Harhar (Kar-Sharrukin).

"A certain Mugallu had taken possession of parts of the Syro-Hittite state of Melid, and associated himself with the king of Tabal. The city of Melid was besieged in 675 B.C.E., but without success. That same year, Humban-Haltash II of Elam began a campaign against Sippar, but was defeated by the Babylonians, and died soon afterwards. His brother and successor Urtaki restored peace with Assyria.

"A preliminary campaign against Egypt begun by Esarhaddon the next year seems to have failed. Meanwhile, Esarhaddon was waging war in the land of Bazu, situated opposite of the island of "Dilmun." (Bahrain), probably Qatar, 'where snakes and scorpions cover the ground like ants'--a dry land of salt deserts. In 673 B.C.E., Esarhaddon waged war against Urartu under king Rusas II, which had strengthened again after the ravages of Sargon II and the Cimmerians.

"In 672 B.C.E., crown prince Sin-iddina-apla died. He had been the oldest son and designated as king of Assyria, while the second son Shamash-shum-ukin was to become the ruler of Babylon. Now, the younger Ashurbanipal became crown prince, but he was very unpopular with the court and the priesthood. Contracts were made with leading Assyrians, members of the royal family and foreign rulers, to assure their loyalty to the crown prince." (**Wikipedia**, 9/26/2016)

Another **Wikipedia article** takes up the story: "Tiring of Egyptian interference in the Assyrian Empire, Esarhaddon decided to conquer Egypt. In 671 B.C.E. he crossed the Sinai Desert, and invaded and took Egypt with surprising ease and speed, driving its foreign Nubian /Kushite and Ethiopian rulers out and destroying the Kushite Empire in the process. Esarhaddon declared himself 'king of Egypt, Libya, and Kush.' Esarhaddon stationed a small army in northern Egypt and describes how 'All Ethiopians (read Nubians / Kushites) I deported from Egypt, leaving not one left to do homage to me.' He installed native Egyptian princes throughout the land to rule on his behalf.

"Under Ashurbanipal (669–627 B.C.E.), Assyrian domination spanned from the Caucasus Mountains (modern Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan) in the north to Nubia, Egypt, Libya and Arabia in the south, and from the East Mediterranean, Cyprus and Antioch in the west to Persia and the Caspian Sea in the east.

"Ultimately, Assyria conquered Babylonia, Chaldea, Elam, Media, Persia, Urartu (Armenia), Phoenicia, ArameaSyria, Phrygia, the Neo-Hittite States, the Hurrian lands, Arabia, Gutium, Israel, Judah, Samarra, Moab, Edom, Corduene, Cilicia, Mannea, and Cyprus, and defeated and / or exacted tribute from Scythia, Cimmeria, Lydia, Nubia,

Ethiopia and others. At its height, the Empire encompassed the whole of the modern nations of Iraq, Syria, Egypt, Lebanon, Israel, Palestine, Jordan, Kuwait, Bahrain, Palestine and Cyprus, together with large swathes of Iran, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Sudan, Libya, Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan.

“Assyria now appeared stronger than ever. However, the long struggles pacifying the Babylonians, Chaldeans, Arameans and Elamites, the exertions undertaken in keeping the Medes, Scythians, Persians, Uartians and Cimmerians subjugated, and the constant campaigning over three centuries to control and expand its vast empire in all directions, had left Assyria materially, economically and physically exhausted. It had been drained of wealth and manpower; the devastated provinces could yield nothing to supply the needs of the imperial exchequer, it was difficult to find sufficient troops to garrison and effectively control the huge empire, and after the death of Ashurbanipal severe civil unrest broke out in Assyria itself, and the empire began to unravel.]

“The Assyrian Empire was severely crippled following the death of Ashurbanipal in 627 BC—the nation and its empire descending into a prolonged and brutal series of civil wars involving three rival kings, Ashur-etil-ilani, Sin-shumu-lishir and Sin-shar-ishkun. Egypt's 26th Dynasty, which had been installed by the Assyrians as vassals, quietly detached itself from Assyria, although it was careful to retain friendly relations.”  
(9/26/2016)

## 5. Lachish Relief in Sennacherib's Palace in Nineveh

“The Lachish relief is a set of Assyrian stone panels narrating the story of the Assyrian victory over the kingdom of Judah during the siege of Lachish in 701 B.C.E. Carved between 700-681 B.C.E., as a decoration of the South-West Palace of Sennacherib in Nineveh, the relief is today exhibited at the British museum in London.. The palace room, where the relief was discovered in 1845-47, was fully covered with the ‘Lachish relief’ and was a little over 39 feet wide.

“The reliefs were discovered by the then 28-year-old Austen Henry Layard during excavations in 1845-47. Commenting on the inscription above the seated figure of Sennacherib, Layard wrote:

Here, therefore, was the actual picture of the taking of Lachish, the city as we know from the **Bible**, besieged by Sennacherib, when he sent his generals to demand tribute of Hezekiah, and which he had captured before their return; evidence of the most remarkable character to confirm the interpretation of the inscriptions, and to identify the king who caused them to be engraved with the Sennacherib of Scripture. This highly interesting series of bas-reliefs contained, moreover, an undoubted representation of a king, a city, and a people, with whose names we are acquainted, and of an event described in Holy Writ. (Austen Henry Layard, **Discoveries Among the Ruins of Nineveh and Babylon**, 1853)

“Layard noted in his work that Henry Rawlinson, the ‘Father of Assyriology,’ disagreed with the identification as the biblical Lachish. Rawlinson had written in 1852: ‘At the same time, it is hardly possible that the capture of Lakitsu, which is figured in the most elaborate manner on the walls of Sennacherib's palace at Nineveh, can refer to this city, as the two names are written quite differently in the Cuneiform characters.’ Layard and others refuted Rawlinson's identification, and the identification as the biblical Lachish prevailed.

“Israeli researcher Yigael Yadin showed that the images of the walls and town depicted fit exactly with the uncovered walls and town as seen from a certain point near the Tel Lachish digs. The descriptions shown in the reliefs were compared with those written about Lachish in the **Bible** and found to be similar as well.

“The events surrounding the conquest of Lachish are recorded in an unparalleled number of sources for the 8th century B.C.E.; in the **Hebrew Bible**, the Lachish reliefs, Assyrian cuneiform prisms and in the archeological excavations at Lachish.

“Sennacherib's conquests of Judean cities, without the capital Jerusalem, are mentioned in the **Bible**, **the Book of Kings**, **Chronicles** and in the **Book of Isaiah**.

Later, when Sennacherib king of Assyria and all his forces were laying siege to Lachish, he sent his officers to Jerusalem with this message for Hezekiah king of Judah and for all the people of Judah who were there—(**2 Chronicles 32:9**)

Now it came to pass in the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah that Sennacherib king of Assyria came up against all the fortified cities of Judah and took them.--  
**(Isaiah 36:1-2)**

“In his annals, Sennacherib claimed that he destroyed 46 fortified cities and towns of Judah and took 200,150 captives, although the number of captives is seen today widely as exaggeration. He also claimed that he besieged King Hezekiah of Judah in Jerusalem "like a bird in a cage." Grabbe and other scholars today consider the city pictured on the Lachish relief to be Jerusalem. They point out that since Jerusalem was not captured by the Assyrians, the artist from Nineveh who carved the relief "added simply Lakisu instead of "Ursalimmu" (Jerusalem). Other authors point out that the siege of Jerusalem is not depicted on the Lachish relief because it resulted in failure and the relief was seen as a way of compensation for not conquering Jerusalem. The size of the relief, its position in the central room of his palace and the fact that the Lachish relief constitutes the only battle portrait created by Sennacherib, indicate the importance he gave to this battle and presumed victory over Judah.”  
**(Wikipedia, 9/21/2016)**

We note that included in the bas-relief of Lachish, are naked captives.

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