

WOMEN AT RISK

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In Isaiah 47, Babylon is described as a woman displaying herself.

As Professor Arthur Cundall points out:

From the earliest chapters of the Bible (Genesis 11.1-9), until the final chapters (Revelation 14.8; 17.5, 18.1-24) Babylon is the symbol of proud humanity who are rebellious against God and His Ways.

Rebellion against God is condemned by Him and it also incurs His Wrath (Deuteronomy 9.24, 1 Samuel 5.23, Nehemiah 9.17, where rebellion is clearly defined as refusal to obey God, Psalm 68.6, Isaiah 30.1, 65.2, where rebellious people are described as those who walk in ways that are not good and after their own thoughts which ways provoke God to anger continually. In Ezekiel 2.3 rebellion is described as transgression, and in Ezekiel 12.2, rebellion is described as the acts of those who know what God says but take no notice.

There are such people today. To disobey God is both rebellion and sin and transgression and it provokes God to anger.

Babylon is portrayed in the opening verses of Isaiah 47 as a young woman, tender and delicate, who bares her legs and uncovers her thighs, that is to say the area between her hips and her knees and this uncovering is nakedness and shame upon which God will take vengeance.

This can easily be dismissed as merely symbolic but for the subsequent words of the Lord God of Hosts, the Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel as He is described here. He speaks to the young woman, "I will not meet thee as a man."

To most men, a tender, delicate young woman with bare thighs results in his looking, which is generally considered natural for red-blooded men, but it can also lead to lust and other things. This woman's display was sexual whether intentional or not. The Lord Jesus said in Matthew 5.28, "Whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart." Lust is a sexual desire which begins with the look, what is seen, namely the lust of the eyes. It is described as one of the sins of the flesh. Men can be enticed by what a woman shows of herself whether intentionally or not.

As a clear example, there is Bathsheba's beauty and exposure of herself (2 Samuel 11.2 ff.) which led to King David desiring her and proceeded to an act of adultery, an infant's death, treachery, deception, lies, murder, further conspiracies, rebellion, broken families, war and, eventually, a divided nation. People tend to blame David for all these troubles. The general attitude today is that all adultery, or, for that matter, any sexual attack upon a woman, is always the man's fault. But, as Dr Herbert Lockyer points out, Bathsheba did nothing to preserve her dignity or to keep herself safe and, after the adulterous act, manifested no sense of guilt. What was Bathsheba doing undressing and taking a bath where she could be overlooked and seen?

Had she not been able to be seen, she would, by definition, not have been seen, and the subsequent adultery, treachery and war might not have happened.

According to what the Lord God says in Isaiah 47 a woman with bare thighs was naked. And it is interesting to note that having bare thighs in rivers and, therefore, her being in water, was still nakedness.

This raises problems with swimming and water sports and, indeed, with other sports where a woman's bare thighs can be seen. It also dictates how a woman should dress at all times and be completely covered.

I have no right to contradict or argue against what God says. Such arguments over the centuries have been the bane of the church, causing ruin, division and denominationalism.

The Apocrypha is generally not regarded as being inspired by God, as are both the Old and New Testaments. However, in Judith 9.2, God speaks of three sexual sins:

- (1) A man who loosens a woman's clothes to defile her.
- (2) A man who violates a virgin.
- (3) A man who uncovers a woman's thighs.

If a man uncovers the thighs of a woman, other than his wife, that is a sin and it is his sin upon which God will take action. If a woman bares her thighs, it is her sin and, God says in Isaiah 47.3, "I will take vengeance." He will punish.

I hear people protest with the usual rejoinder that this is the Old Testament which suggests that this teaching is, therefore, obsolete.

That is another dangerous argument.

In Exodus 20, we have the ten commandments and, later in the same chapter at verse 26, God says, "Thou shalt not go up... steps so that thy nakedness will not be seen." In Exodus 28.42 ff., we read that nakedness must be prevented and garments had to cover the loins and the thighs. While this refers to the priests ministering in their offices, the teaching is clear. The priests were an example for the people to follow. They were intended to represent holiness, and holiness is that which God requires of His people. To be at the bottom of some steps, or anywhere else for that matter, and look up someone's skirt or tunic, seeing their thighs or underwear, was seeing their nakedness and God forbids it.

In Nahum 3, female prisoners of war were not chained but the men were (verse 10). As Lockyer writes, "The coarse soldiers escorting them amused themselves by 'discovering their skirts upon their faces and seeing their nakedness and shame.' What a baptism of tears, anguish and indignities women have received through the centuries." Whether these women wore underwear, the 'girdles upon their loins' (Ezekiel 23.15), or nothing underneath, they were naked because their skirts were lifted. A woman with naked thighs or showing her intimate garments was naked.

Adam and Eve were still naked after they had partially clothed themselves with fig leaves. When the Lord called to Adam, the man replied, "I heard Thy voice and I hid myself because I was naked." (Genesis 3.10).

Leviticus 18 tells of Divine prohibition against viewing the nakedness of anyone to whom one is not married. While this refers to unlawful marriages, fornication and adulterous relationships, including homosexuality, it must also mean what it says: Thou shalt not uncover the nakedness of... and this confirms the other Biblical passages which we have quoted.

Isaiah 20 speaks of the prophet being instructed by God to walk barefoot and naked for three years which action prefigured the shameful captivity of Egypt and Ethiopia. While verse 3 states that he did do this for three years, he was not completely nude. He was brought up in a strict, princely family. He knew God's laws on indecent exposure and would not have violated them. Nor would God break His own laws. Arthur Cundall writes that God used Isaiah as a visual aid, in effect, shamelessly dressed as a prisoner of war. W.H. Knox agrees and points out that Isaiah in his loin-cloth underwear was naked

and a symbol of sin's degradation and shame. And so is anyone who shows or risks showing their underwear or any garments positionally worn where underwear is also worn

Dr F.A. Tatford in his exposition of Amos refers to soldiers who in the day of a battle that was going against them, stripped themselves of their battle dress and outer clothing and fled. Amos 2.16 records that in this state they were naked. Tatford also comments on Micah 1.8 which reads, "I will wait and howl; I will go stripped and naked," and writes that this does not mean completely devoid of clothes but merely wearing and therefore displaying their underwear. David J Clark confirms that this would mean barefoot and divested of outer garments.

Nakedness in the Bible is always a picture of sin and shame. And, as we have already seen, there is plenty of Biblical evidence for this. But, in addition, the Hebrew and Greek words state its meanings. The Hebrew word *arom* means nude or partially nude, not completely covered, being scantily clad wearing 'just enough', or it can mean being poorly dressed in the sense of having inadequate clothing. And this is also associated with sin and shame. Eliphaz falsely accused Job of stripping the naked of their clothing (Job 22.6). Of course, this does not mean that Job went around undressing people. As David J. Clines points out this false accusation was that Job, being a rich man, failed to supply the poor with adequate clothing. The Greek word for naked is *gumneteuo* which means to strip, to be undressing or dressing, to be scantily clad wearing 'just enough' to hide one's private parts, or to be nude. Both words can, and often, mean to be clothed with what is just sufficient.

Again, the cry will go up that this is merely Jewish culture and, after all, it is Old Testament teaching and, therefore, antiquated. And that I am extremely old-fashioned and ridiculous.

In John 21, Peter recognises the Risen Lord. Peter secures and encircles his fisher's coat about him (that is what the word *girt* means) and jumps into the sea. The reason for this is given. He was naked. The fisher's coat and the sea would cover him. It is highly unlikely that he was nude, but, rather, stripped to his waist, in his underwear and barefoot, as Isaiah was. In the company of the other fishermen-disciples this did not matter to Peter, but it did in the Presence of the Lord.

Revelation 16.15 records God's works of blessing on those who 'keepeth his, or her, garments on' rather than be seen, or risk being seen naked. Professor F.F. Bruce, in his exposition of Revelation refers to the passage in Amos 2.16 as a direct corroboration. No decent person wants to be seen naked... but, for the Christian who understands God's Word, he, or she, would not want to be naked in any of the Biblical meanings of the word.

The apostle Paul in 1 Timothy 2.9 speaks of women that they must dress in modest apparel with shamefacedness and sobriety. Shamefacedness means bashful and shy whereas sobriety means tranquil, sedate and serious. The important word is modest. It means decorous which, in turn, means dignified, composed and serious, bashful and shy, not in the sense of being timid or nervous, but decent, respectable, not wanting to be looked at amorously or lecherously, and giving no occasion for this.

But, almost everybody today, including Christians, will still object to this teaching. Some have actually said to me that if this is the Biblical teaching, then God is unfair.

That is yet another dangerous argument.

Let us proceed to some other Biblical teachings. One is that we are not to cause the other to sin. We are not to tempt, tease or taunt another. We are not to be a stumbling-block (Isaiah 57.14; Romans 14.13). In other words, we are not to give any offence or occasion for someone else to fall or sin. It must be remembered that Jesus Christ died for our sins and, as a consequence, we are to live righteously (1 Peter 2.24). These are serious issues.

In 1 Kings 16.2, God spoke through a prophet to King Baasha saying, “Thou hast made my people in Israel to sin and they have provoked me to anger with their sins.” And, we read in verse 3, that God’s judgement is not upon Israel here but upon Baasha and his posterity. The Biblical teaching is that we are responsible for our own sins and the sins others commit which we have caused them to do.

The first sinner was the first woman, Eve. She enticed Adam her husband to sin. From the beginning of time, women have used their power both to entice and ensnare men and to cause them to sin. That does not mean that all sin is women’s fault but that a woman was the first sinner. Eve was a temptress (Genesis 3.6) and Delilah used her femininity to deceive and ultimately destroy Samson (Judges 16.6). Women who use their sexuality to entice or deceive any man will have an end that is as bitter as wormwood and her steps shall take her to hell (Proverbs 5.3 ff.).

But it should not be taken that all such women are harlots. The women of Jerusalem who were proud of their beauty and flaunted it in Isaiah 3.16 ff were probably not harlots. They had wanton, wicked and seductive eyes and were mincing as they walked. Mincing is the Hebrew word *aphaph* which means coquettishly, the art of flirting and seducing. They were showing off that they were women and out to entice men.

And God condemns such women. In graphic language, He condemns their vanity. Instead of their smelling of sweet perfume, they will stink; their fashionable clothes will be torn; instead of their beautiful hairstyles, there will be baldness; instead of wearing a stomacher, which is an undergarment, namely a luxurious bodice, they will have to wear sackcloth, and instead of beauty they will be branded, which could mean a scar, a smarting, blisters or severe itching (v. 24).

God utterly disapproves of such women and declares them guilty of sin. A woman with bare thighs is naked and in sin; a woman who dresses to entice men is in sin; a woman who leads a man astray causing him to sin is sinning herself. The women who want to attract men, or who want men to look at them, are women ‘on the hunt’ as it says in Ezekiel 13.18.

But it is to the example of Bathsheba that I return. What was she doing undressing, being nude and taking a bath where she could be seen, since seen she was. Was she so naïve? Was she like the woman of Isaiah 47 who said, “No one can see me.” (verse 10)?

However unfair this Biblical teaching may appear to be, it is both morally right and it is common sense.

Let me give some examples.

In our days one catches glimpses of children and teenage girls undressing and dressing on the beach behind towels and, through no one else’s fault, their nudity is sometimes seen. Such events provide opportunities for voyeurs, perverts and paedophiles to commit offences and it encourages serious sexual attacks on women. As with Bathsheba, these girls and women carry some responsibility.

A woman showing her underwear is similar to a man having his flies undone... in fact, it is worse.

If a man attacks a woman then he must be punished but what women and society fail to recognise is that if women were always fully covered and did not show or accentuate, or even risk showing their cleavages, thighs or underwear, then they would not so easily entice men and would thereby prevent some possible offences against women.

Women generally will not accept this concept. Some years ago, an experiment was arranged. A hundred men between the ages of 18 and 50 were shown the 1971 film *Walkabout* starring Jenny Agutter who was then a teenager. All the invited men had no history of crimes against children or women. They all

filled in a questionnaire without collusion. Ninety-six percent stated that the most sexually arousing scenes were not when Jenny Agutter was nude but when she was showing her bare thighs and underwear. What was distressing was that several of these men after the showing of the film tried to procure women almost immediately and this was clearly motivated by what they had seen of Jenny Agutter.

Attacks on women are very often precipitated by the way in which women both dress and behave and, as the above example shows, how they are presented by the media.

Novelty is preferred to nudity as our experiment proved. A woman with bare thighs, showing her underwear encourages sexual arousal, lust and sexual attacks upon women. And crimes against women and female children must be reduced... but will the women help themselves and their young daughters by always dressing modestly?

It is incontestable that the beach and the swimming pool are the most popular venues for incitement to sexual offences. This is because people wear what is 'just sufficient' and what people wear is often the catalyst for sexual crimes. Nightclubs and other similar establishments are also favourite hunting grounds and any woman dressed provocatively is at risk. Case law is full of such examples. And still women object to this fact of life.

Therefore what God says is that a woman with bare thighs, lifted, or short skirt, or showing her underwear was naked and committing sin. God was, in His Infinite Wisdom, telling women how to dress so as to avoid tempting men and also how to protect themselves from being the victims of crime.

There is a second, commonsensical reason. The exposure of the body to the sun can cause skin cancer. There were 40,626 new cases reported in 1996 in England alone. The medical profession have recently said that skin cancer can be caused by only two attacks of sunburn and that, while skin creams and lotions, even those of the more expensive kind, may prevent visible or physical burning, such sun-protection preparations do not work.

Exposure to the sun can cause cancer and death. Yet if the body is fully covered the risk is negligible. In Eastern countries, where modesty of dress is practised and the body is fully covered, skin cancer is rare.

And so, if we want to reduce sexual crimes and also eradicate forms of skin cancer we should heed the Biblical teaching about modesty and decency.

Sexual crimes include unlawful intercourse and, therefore, the risk of sexually transmitted diseases such as AIDS.

AIDS is the fourth largest cause of death in the world. It is rampant in Africa where, according to the Medical Health Organisation, five and a half thousand people die of AIDS each day. That is over two million people a year on one continent alone. The disease is transmitted by sexual activity and, although this is a debatable point, by sharing the same facilities including communal water supplies.

There are some medical 'experts' who state that no virus can survive or be transmitted in water (AIDS is a virus) and, even if it could, the virus could be treated and the patient cured. In other words, no one could die of a virus contracted in water.

That is nonsense.

My own first girlfriend died from a virus she contracted in a swimming pool in 1967. A young Hampshire man died from AIDS at the age of 20. He had never received any blood products, had had no injections or vaccines since he was a young child; he had taken no drugs; he was not homosexual; he had never had a girlfriend or any sexual activity; there were no other examples of AIDS within his family. He

lived for swimming and spent many hours every day at the pool and over a period of twelve years or so. How did he catch AIDS?

Dr John Starkie, an eminent immunologist, in his book *Understanding AIDS* talks about the spread of this disease in swimming pools used by homosexual men in the San Francisco area. Experiments on animals have shown that a minimal amount of the virus diluted in water and injected into a chimp in one such experiment gave the animal AIDS. And the proportion of the virus in relation to the water was 0.0001 per cent.

We will conclude with a fine example of female modesty and common sense in the Bible. In the opening chapter of the book of Esther, we read of Queen Vashti, a brave woman who exalted modesty. She was married to King Ahasuerus and was probably the most beautiful woman in his kingdom. After an extended party the King ordered Vashti to appear to show the people of the kingdom her beauty. She refused. As Lockyer writes, "She was not going to oppose the laws of feminine honour and decency. All praise to the heroic Vashti for her decent disobedience."

Vashti was deposed as Queen because she did not want anyone to look at her amorously or lecherously. This is modesty.

Of course I will be severely criticised and condemned and, indeed, ridiculed. I will be called a typical conservative Christian, old-fashioned, Puritanical, not with it, a killjoy and judgemental. I will have abuse thrown at me and about me and called all sorts of names. I may even be condemned as not living in the present times and if the Bible teaches what I have set out here then it has no credibility or relevance for today.

What is important is the respect and safety of the female sex and that is a Biblical concept. While men and lesbians who attack women must be severely punished the health and safety of women is far more important than sport and glamour, far more important than modern trends and fashion, and more important than public opinion even the majority view.

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