

Judgment on Egypt

Isaiah 19-20

Isaiah 19:1-4 - *“The burden against Egypt. Behold, the Lord rides on a swift cloud, and will come into Egypt. The idols of Egypt will totter at His presence, and the heart of Egypt will melt in its midst. ² “I will set Egyptians against Egyptians. Everyone will fight against his brother, and everyone against his neighbor; city against city, kingdom against kingdom. ³ The spirit of Egypt will fail in its midst; I will destroy their counsel, and they will consult the idols and the charmers, the mediums and the sorcerers. ⁴ And the Egyptians I will give into the hand of a cruel master, and a fierce king will rule over them,” says the Lord, the Lord of hosts.”*

Background Notes

In Isaiah 19 and 20, the prophecy of God’s judgment continued on the nations surrounding the southern kingdom of Judah in Isaiah’s day. It was important for the people of Judah to hear the prophecy of judgment against Egypt, because many in Judah were looking to Egypt for help, in view of the threat of the coming Assyrian invasion.

In chapters 7 and 17, Syria and the northern kingdom of Israel (also called “Ephraim”) were trying to pressure Judah into joining in an alliance against Assyria. Through Isaiah, the Lord’s message to Judah was that they should not join in **any** alliance against Assyria, because it would be futile. The people of Judah were to depend totally on the Lord.

Sure enough, Syria and its capital city, Damascus, fell to the Assyrians in 732 BC, and the northern kingdom of Israel and its capital city, Samaria, fell to the Assyrians in 722 BC. As Assyria turned its sights toward Judah, there was a strong tendency for the Jews of Judah to look south to Egypt for help. In view of the Assyrian threat, why not form an alliance with Egypt? For one good reason - an alliance with Egypt would be futile. Egypt would be powerless to help, because Egypt itself would fall to the Assyrians.

Doctrinal Points

1. The Lord pronounced judgment against Egypt.

Just as the gods of Egypt could not help the Egyptians at the time of the Exodus, so they would be helpless now. Isaiah 19:1 emphasized that the Lord would bring Egypt down, even though it might seem that natural or political reasons caused its defeat.

God was going to bring about civil war in Egypt. Upper and Lower Egypt would not be unified (v2). The Egyptians would be so demoralized that they would turn to the occult world of mediums and spiritists for help and advice, but to no avail (v3). Egypt would not escape the Assyrian threat. In fact, Assyria conquered Egypt in 671 BC, and the “*cruel master*” of verse 4 was probably Ashur-nadin of Assyria.

Verses 5-10 predicted that the Lord would bring a drought on Egypt. The life-blood of Egypt, the Nile River, would begin to dry up and it would bring economic as well as natural disaster on Egypt:

Isaiah 19:5-10 - *“The waters will fail from the sea, and the river will be wasted and dried up. ⁶ The rivers will turn foul; the brooks of defense will be emptied and dried up; the reeds and rushes will wither. ⁷ The papyrus reeds by the River, by the mouth of the River, and everything sown by the River will wither, be driven away, and be no more. ⁸ The fishermen also will mourn; all those will lament who cast hooks into the River, and they will languish who spread nets on the waters. ⁹ Moreover those who work in fine flax and those who weave fine fabric will be ashamed; ¹⁰ and its foundations will be broken. All who make wages will be troubled of soul.*

Egypt depended on the Nile to overflow its banks each year to irrigate the land. At the flood time of year, the Nile looked like a sea. But God said the waters of the Nile would insufficient to reach flood stage (v5). The entire economy of Egypt was dependent on the Nile, and thus the whole fabric of society would suffer. Remember - God can judge and speak to any nation in the same way today.

In verses 11-15, all the wise men and wisdom of Egypt would not be able to stop the coming disaster, because this was God’s judgment:

Isaiah 19:11-15 - *“Surely the princes of Zoan are fools; Pharaoh’s wise counselors give foolish counsel. How do you say to Pharaoh, “I am the son of the wise, the son of ancient kings?” ¹² Where are they? Where are your wise men? Let them tell you now, and let them know what the Lord of hosts has purposed against Egypt. ¹³ The princes of Zoan have become fools; the princes of Noph are deceived; they have also deluded Egypt, those who are the mainstay of its tribes. ¹⁴ The Lord has mingled a perverse spirit in her midst; and they have caused Egypt to err in all her work, as a drunken man staggers in his vomit. ¹⁵ Neither will there be any work for Egypt, which the head or tail, palm branch or bulrush, may do.*

At the time of the Exodus, the Egyptian advisors, the wise men, and the magicians with their occult practices were no match for the God of Israel. And the Egyptian “think tanks” of Isaiah’s day were equally a complete failure. They were deluded and confused - like advice from someone who is drunk (v13-14). They were leading their own nation into economic and political chaos (v15).

Therefore the warning was: “Judah, get your act together! Don’t depend on Egypt for help against Assyria. Egypt is under judgment. The Lord has pronounced judgment against Egypt. Only the Lord can give you help!”

2. The Lord promised future blessing for Egypt.

Isaiah 19:16-23 - *“In that day Egypt will be like women, and will be afraid and fear because of the waving of the hand of the Lord of hosts, which He waves over it. ¹⁷ And the land of Judah will be a terror to Egypt; everyone who makes mention of it will be afraid in himself, because of the counsel of the Lord of hosts which He has determined against it.*

¹⁸ In that day five cities in the land of Egypt will speak the language of Canaan and swear by the Lord of hosts; one will be called the City of Destruction.

¹⁹ In that day there will be an altar to the Lord in the midst of the land of Egypt, and a pillar to the Lord at its border. ²⁰ And it will be for a sign and for a witness to the Lord of hosts in the land of Egypt; for they will cry to the Lord because of the oppressors, and He will send them a Savior and a Mighty One, and He will deliver them. ²¹ Then the Lord will be known to Egypt, and the Egyptians will know the Lord in that day, and will make sacrifice and offering; yes, they will make a vow to the Lord and perform it. ²² And the Lord will strike Egypt, He will strike and heal it; they will return to the Lord, and He will be entreated by them and heal them.

²³ In that day there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria, and the Assyrian will come into Egypt and the Egyptian into Assyria, and the Egyptians will serve with the Assyrians. “In that day Israel will be one of three with Egypt and Assyria - a blessing in the midst of the land, whom the Lord of hosts shall bless, saying, “Blessed is Egypt My people, and Assyria the work of My hands, and Israel My inheritance.”

Verses 16-25 contain a prophecy of future blessing for Egypt. Look at the end of verse 20. God will *“send them a Savior and a Mighty One, and He will deliver them.”* When will Egypt receive this promised blessing? Blessing will come to Egypt in the millennial kingdom of Christ, when our Lord returns to earth to reign in His glorious kingdom.

The key is Isaiah’s use of the phrase *“in that day.”* That phrase was used *five times* in these verses. The use of that phrase means that these prophecies will not be fulfilled until the End Times. For example, the international highway between Egypt and Iraq (v23) does not yet exist - but it will!

Notice: these verses are **not** speaking about the Church today - as some teachers incorrectly suggest. In addition, the “altar” and the “pillar” in verse 19 are **not** Egypt’s Great Pyramid - as some interpreters wrongly infer!

Verses 24-25 are great verses to show your Arabic-speaking friends: *“In that day Israel will be one of three with Egypt and Assyria - a blessing in the midst of the land, whom the Lord of hosts shall bless, saying, “Blessed is Egypt My people, and Assyria the work of My hands, and Israel My inheritance.”*

In the millennial kingdom of Christ, God’s blessing will be upon all the nations that turn to the Lord - not just upon Israel. The Lord promised future blessing for Egypt.

Practical Application

Are we willing to be “embarrassed for the Lord”?

Isaiah 20 - *“In the year that Tartan came to Ashdod, when Sargon the king of Assyria sent him, and he fought against Ashdod and took it, ² at the same time the Lord spoke by Isaiah the son of Amoz, saying, “Go, and remove the sackcloth from your body, and take your sandals off your feet.” And he did so, walking naked and barefoot.*

³ Then the Lord said, “Just as My servant Isaiah has walked naked and barefoot three years for a sign and a wonder against Egypt and Ethiopia, ⁴ so shall the king of Assyria lead away the Egyptians as prisoners and the Ethiopians as captives, young and old, naked and barefoot, with their buttocks uncovered, to the shame of Egypt. ⁵ Then they shall be afraid and ashamed of Ethiopia their expectation and Egypt their glory. ⁶ And the inhabitant of this territory will say in that day, ‘Surely such is our expectation, wherever we flee for help to be delivered from the king of Assyria; and how shall we escape?’”

In order to drive home the point that the Egyptians would be no help to the people of Judah against the threat of Assyria, the Lord asked Isaiah to do something that must have been very embarrassing – especially in that culture. Isaiah was to strip off his outer clothes, down to his undergarments. This illustrated the Assyrian custom of stripping the clothing from their defeated captives. The point of Isaiah’s “object lesson” was that the people of Egypt would be defeated, and they would be led away *“naked and barefoot”* by the conquering Assyrian armies.

You can imagine the people’s shocked reaction when they saw the prophet Isaiah walking around Jerusalem in a shameful lack of clothing. But they would ask why, and Isaiah would give them the Lord’s warning: “Don’t depend on Egypt, because Egypt will be conquered by Assyria!” Isaiah got the Lord’s message across to the people of Judah, even though the Lord asked him to communicate it through an embarrassing object lesson.

A Christian businessman who recently spent some time in Cameroon told me that when someone becomes a Christian in that country, they’re expected to carry a sign through town saying that they’ve become a Christian. We might find that embarrassing. Would we be willing to do something like that, to communicate God’s message?

Are we willing to be embarrassed for the Lord? Are we willing to be laughed at, as we communicate an unpopular message? Are we willing to appear foolish and naïve when we affirm the inerrancy of the Word of God? Are we willing to support biblical standards, when we know we we’ll be ridiculed (or maligned) for doing so?

“I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes...”
(Romans 1:16). Are we willing to be “embarrassed for the Lord”?