

## ISAIAH 19

## AGAINST EGYPT

Most of us know at least a little about the land of Egypt. It was that country to the southwest of the land of Canaan, where Joseph was sold as a slave by his brothers, and where the Israelites suffered hard bondage under the cruel Pharaoh. Rain scarcely ever falls in Egypt. The land is watered by the Nile River, which is here referred to by the prophet in verse 5. The river flows through the whole length of the country; and every summer, it overflows its banks for a few weeks – thereby watering the land and preparing it to receive the seed which soon springs up in the rich, wet soil. Travelers in Egypt may see there – even at this present day – large and wonderful buildings which Joseph and Moses themselves likely gazed upon, for they were built long before the Israelites came to sojourn in the land.

In Isaiah's day, Egypt was still a very powerful kingdom. But not long afterwards, its government fell into great confusion, and the second verse was literally fulfilled! The Egyptians fought against the Egyptians – “every one against his brother.” The nation, of course, was much enfeebled by these quarrels; and never again did it recover its power. More than 100 years after Isaiah's time, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon found no great difficulty in conquering Egypt. He overthrew their government; and from that time forward, no more Pharaohs sat upon the throne of Egypt. For a long time, it was a humbled, conquered country – subjected first to the kingdom of Babylon; and afterwards to the kingdom of Persia, which conquered that of Babylon.

A description of the humiliation of Egypt fills a large portion of this chapter, up through verse 17. What a contrast to the description of her glory in those days when Pharaoh was upon his throne; and when he made Joseph his prime minister, and clothed him with fine linen, and put a gold chain upon his neck, and made him ride in his second chariot! (Gen. 41:42-43) And what a contrast, too, to the day of her pride – when another Pharaoh said, “Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice to let Israel go?” (Ex. 5:2) The lesson which this whole subject teaches us is the certainty with which the Lord will surely punish sinners – even though, for a long time, He seems to take no notice of them. For hundreds and hundreds of years, the kingdom of Egypt flourished. She continued to build one magnificent temple and monument after another. In every direction, her trade and her glory increased; and it seemed as if the Lord was taking no heed of her idolatry, or of her enmity toward His people. But His eye was upon her the whole time! He had already appointed her day of vengeance; and when that day came, the heart of Egypt melted at His presence.

**Outline of the chapter:**

- ❖ A prophecy of judgment upon the land of Egypt – verses 1-17
- ❖ A foretelling of future deliverance, and of the bringing of the Gospel into the land of Egypt – verses 18-25





In the first 17 verses of this passage, we read only of judgment; but the rest of this chapter contains promises of mercy to Egypt. After the desolation which we have just read about, Egypt *did* enjoy a period of prosperity in which these promises were fulfilled in some degree. About 400 years after Isaiah lived, Egypt was freed from subjection to other countries. And although her own line of Pharaohs no longer occupied their throne, yet another set of kings (all of whom bore the name of Ptolemy) governed the land for about 200 years; and these kings raised the country to something similar to its former glory and prosperity. During their rule, many Jews settled in Egypt – carrying thither the knowledge and worship of Jehovah. Thus there was “an altar to the Lord in the midst of the land of Egypt” (verse 19). After our Savior’s earthly ministry, His Gospel was preached in Egypt as well as in other countries; and within 300 years, Christianity spread there to such an extent that the whole land of Egypt might almost be said to have been Christian. At Alexandria, one of Egypt’s chief cities, there was a large college for educating Christian ministers; and many of the most holy and educated Christians of those days were from Egypt. Surely, verse 21 might be said to have been fulfilled in those days: “The Lord shall be known to Egypt, and the Egyptians shall know the Lord in that day.”

Nevertheless, the whole passage also has a much fuller accomplishment. Verse 24 declares, “In that day shall Israel be the third with Egypt and with Assyria, even a blessing in the midst of the land.” What a blessed conclusion to this sweet sermon of prophecy! The wall of separation that had surrounded Israel for ages is now thrown down. The Gentiles – under the picture of the Assyrians (to the north of Israel) and the Egyptians (to the south of Israel) – are now brought into the same sheepfold as the believing Jews, and we are all under one Shepherd: Jesus Christ! Let us observe the graciousness of the Lord’s promise. Although Egypt was formerly a house of bondage to the people of God, and Assyria was an unjust invader of their country; yet the Lord declares that all shall be forgiven and forgotten, and that Egypt and Assyria – if they returned to Him – would be as welcome to Him as His own Israel was. “The Lord retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy” (Mic. 7:18). Let us learn to admire the riches and the freeness of Christ’s mercy, as it is seen here; and let each of us seek that mercy for ourselves! It does not matter what our sin or rebellion may have been. We may have been like Egypt and Assyria – ignorant of the Lord, and idolatrously given up to the love and service of the world. Or we may have been like Israel – backsliding from our God. But whatever our guilt and our misery has been, let us cry out to the Lord, and we shall be healed! (Ex. 15:26; Hos. 14:4)

*Lord, we beseech You to accomplish Your gracious promises of mercy and forgiveness to many multitudes of sinners, so that they may return to You! Amen.*