

Salvation Highway Isaiah 19:1-25

Isaiah chapter 19, and we will be reading the whole chapter, verses 1 to 25. Before the reading, we'll pray. Please join me in prayer.

Our Father in heaven, we do pray that you would speak to us from your word. We seek from you the wisdom of God. Father, we ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

Isaiah chapter 19, starting at verse 1: "An oracle concerning Egypt. Behold, the LORD is riding on a swift cloud and comes to Egypt; and the idols of Egypt will tremble at his presence, and the heart of the Egyptians will melt within them. ² And I will stir up Egyptians against Egyptians, and they will fight, each against another and each against his neighbor, city against city, kingdom against kingdom; ³ and the spirit of the Egyptians within them will be emptied out, and I will confound their counsel; and they will inquire of the idols and the sorcerers, and the mediums and the necromancers; ⁴ and I will give over the Egyptians into the hand of a hard master, and a fierce king will rule over them, declares the Lord GOD of hosts.

⁵ And the waters of the sea will be dried up, and the river will be dry and parched, ⁶ and its canals will become foul, and the branches of Egypt's Nile will diminish and dry up, reeds and rushes will rot away. ⁷ There will be bare places by the Nile, on the brink of the Nile, and all that is sown by the Nile will be parched, will be driven away, and will be no more. ⁸ The fishermen will mourn and lament, all who cast a hook in the Nile; and they will languish who spread nets on the water. ⁹ The workers in combed flax will be in despair, and the weavers of white cotton. ¹⁰ Those who are the pillars of the land will be crushed, and all who work for pay will be grieved.

¹¹ The princes of Zoan are utterly foolish; the wisest counselors of Pharaoh give stupid counsel. How can you say to Pharaoh, 'I am a son of the wise, a son of ancient kings'? ¹² Where then are your wise men? Let them tell you that they might know what the LORD of hosts has purposed against Egypt. ¹³ The princes of Zoan have become fools, and the princes of Memphis are deluded; those who are the cornerstones of her tribes have made Egypt stagger. ¹⁴ The LORD has mingled within her a spirit of confusion, and they will make Egypt stagger in all its deeds, as a drunken man staggers in his vomit. ¹⁵ And there will be nothing for Egypt that head or tail, palm branch or reed, may do.

¹⁶ In that day the Egyptians will be like women, and tremble with fear before the hand that the LORD of hosts shakes over them. ¹⁷ And the land of Judah will become a terror to the Egyptians. Everyone to whom it is mentioned will fear because of the purpose that the LORD of hosts has purposed against them.

¹⁸ In that day there will be five cities in the land of Egypt that speak the language of Canaan and swear allegiance to the LORD of hosts. One of these 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 It will be a sign and a witness to the LORD of hosts in the land of Egypt. When they cry to the LORD because of oppressors, he will send them a savior and defender, and deliver them. ²¹ And the LORD will make himself known to the Egyptians, and the Egyptians will

know the LORD in that day and worship with sacrifice and offering, and they will make vows to the LORD and perform them. ²² And the LORD will strike Egypt, striking and healing, and they will return to the LORD, and he will listen to their pleas for mercy and heal them.

“²³ In that day there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria, and Assyria will come into Egypt, and Egypt into Assyria, and the Egyptians will worship with the Assyrians.

“²⁴ In that day Israel will be the third with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth, ²⁵ whom the LORD of hosts has blessed, saying, ‘Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel my inheritance.’” Amen.

It’s an enormously rich passage before us this morning. I’ve got a lot more notes in front of me than I normally bring in, but I’m hoping to work my way through them fairly quickly, because I want to get more to my conclusions than spend a lot of time trying to expound particular verses in the text.

Before we get going, I want you to always remember when we’re speaking of Egypt in the Old Testament, Egypt had a certain place and role in Jewish history. From where did God rescue His people by the hand of Moses? Egypt. The place that the Jews were told never to return to was Egypt.

You could say there are really two kingdoms that in the Old Testament scheme of things come to represent the world and all the evil things that are in the world. One of those would be Egypt, the house of slavery, the house under the power of the supposedly god-man, Pharaoh, and the other would be Babylon. And you find that Babylon gets picked up in the New Testament by the authors of the New Testament, and you go right through to the book of Revelation, and in the book of Revelation, when the beast called Antichrist is cast down, it appears that at the same time, a power on the earth, the spiritual political power that’s called Babylon, is also cast down.

And so you have Egypt and Babylon, and both of those kingdoms in the Old Testament become a picture of all that is evil, of the nations of the world in rebellion against God—man setting up his own petty little power structures, in rebellion against the will of God. And today’s chapter, our passage for the day, deals particularly with Egypt, but also with Assyria. You notice towards the end of the passage, there’s this talk of a highway from Egypt to Assyria, And Egypt and Assyria and Judah, or Israel—Egypt to Assyria and Israel—Israel being the third, will be a blessing in the midst of the earth.

And you sort of start to think, “Well hang on. What’s going on there, especially when you think about that place called Assyria—Assyria becomes Babylon?” In world history, in ancient history, the history of this age in which Isaiah was writing, Assyria basically destroys the nations, leaving Judah, and then Assyria is itself taken over by the Babylonians, and the Babylonians come and destroy Judah. So Assyria and Babylon are sort of the same place, just under different names and different times. And so here we have this picture of God dealing with nations that are enemies, nations that have always been enemies. And God punishes those nations—Egypt, and earlier on in the book of Isaiah, Assyria.

And yet, at the same time, God says He's going to draw His elect out of the very nations that are in rebellion to Him. He's going to draw His worshippers from those nations, even at the same time as He is destroying them. And even at the same time as Egypt is a nation which hates and rebels against God, it says that within Egypt, there'll be an altar to the Lord. There will be cities dedicated to God. There will be prayer, and sacrifice, and revelation, all happening in Egypt.

How do you interpret things like this? How do we understand things like this? Well, I'll be honest with you. I'll put it straight up in front of us. A Premillennial approach would see these things being fulfilled in the future thousand-year reign of the Lord Jesus Christ. They will see these things having their fulfillment yet in the future. The Premillennial approach will see, in verse 23, where it speaks of a highway, that's literally going to happen in the Middle East. The Lord Jesus Christ will be reigning from Jerusalem, there will be a temple of some sort in Jerusalem, there will be a highway system bringing the people of the world into Jerusalem, where this worship will be centered.

Especially a dispensational, or a more dispensational view of Premillennialism, would say these things must be literal. The fulfillment must be literal. The words are there, it's in plain language, therefore, that's what it must mean. Now you know I'm not Premillennial, and you know I'm going to give a differing explanation. If I fit into any grouping it would be as an Amillennialist. And I don't think you'll change your mind, and I don't expect anyone to be changing their mind easily. A Christian is supposed to be a person of conviction and conscience.

So if any teaching is encouraging you to think of things in a different way, it only makes sense that it should take a long time for that teaching to be accepted. But I'm just hoping you'll understand why I see it in a different way. That's about enough of an introduction. As I said, there's a lot in it and we could go for hours, but I'm not going to let that happen. So let's get into our text.

Verse 1, notice something. "An oracle concerning Egypt. Behold, [Yahweh] is riding on a swift cloud and comes to Egypt." Your Bibles will I expect say "The LORD," the LORD being capitalized—capital "L", capital "O", capital "R", capital "D". That's the covenant name, the Old Testament covenant name of God: YHWH. "Yahweh," as far as we can tell, is what that means. Yahweh, the cloud-rider. What's Isaiah telling us? Well, we have to look basically through Scripture to get some meaning on this phrase "Yahweh the cloud-rider," or "Yahweh riding on a swift cloud." So let's draw some verses together.

I want you to go to Exodus chapter 19 to start with. The particular verse I want to look at is verse 9, but we'll start reading at verse 7. ⁷ "So Moses came and called the elders of the people and set before them all these words that the LORD had commanded him. ⁸ All the people answered together and said, 'All that the LORD has spoken we will do.' And Moses reported the words of the people to the LORD. ⁹ And the LORD said to Moses, 'Behold, I am coming to you in a thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with you, and may also believe you forever.' When Moses told the words of the people to the LORD, ¹⁰ the LORD said to Moses, 'Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow, and let them wash their garments ¹¹ and be ready for the third day. For on the third day the LORD will come down on Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people.'"

Obviously verse 9 is the one where I'm wanting you to look. How is it that the Lord is going to come to Moses and the people are going to know that the Lord is coming? "Behold, I am coming to you in a thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with you, and may also believe you forever"—God, speaking through Moses to the people from the cloud; God, coming to Moses on the cloud, or in the cloud. It's the idea of the presence of the Lord communicating His will to a people. And we have in Isaiah, Isaiah telling the world that God is coming on a swift cloud to Egypt.

Let's look at another reference, Psalm 97. Now Psalm 97 is a psalm giving praise and glory to God, who rules over the earth. If you just look very quickly at verse 1: "The LORD reigns, let the earth rejoice; let the many coastlands be glad!" And it speaks of God's dealing with His people, it speaks of God's dealing with idols, it speaks of how idols are worthless and worth nothing.

Psalm 97: ¹The LORD reigns, let the earth rejoice; let the many coastlands be glad! ²Clouds and thick darkness are all around him; righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne. ³Fire goes before him and burns up his adversaries all around. ⁴His lightnings light up the world; the earth sees and trembles. ⁵The mountains melt like wax before the LORD, before the Lord of all the earth. ⁶The heavens proclaim his righteousness, and all the peoples see his glory. ⁷All worshipers of images are put to shame, who make their boast in worthless idols; worship him, all you gods! ⁸Zion hears and is glad, and the daughters of Judah rejoice, because of your judgments, O LORD."

And so here you have the picture of the Lord, coming in clouds and thick darkness. "Let the earth rejoice." Why? For He's coming to cast down worthless idols, worthless things. And He's coming to put to shame those who worship these worthless idols. The heavens are proclaiming His righteousness. The peoples are seeing His glory. Verse 9 tells us, "For you, O LORD, are most high over all the earth; you are exalted far above all gods." This is the Lord. This is Yahweh who's coming to Egypt.

Move on to Psalm 104, starting in verse 1 again. ¹Bless the LORD, O my soul! O LORD my God, you are very great! You are clothed with splendor and majesty, ²covering yourself with light as with a garment, stretching out the heavens like a tent. ³He lays the beams of his chambers on the waters; he makes the clouds his chariot; he rides on the wings of the wind; ⁴he makes his messengers winds, his ministers a flaming fire. ⁵He set the earth on its foundations, so that it should never be moved." We won't keep reading.

The Lord—"Bless the Lord!" The Lord who is very great, clothed in splendor and majesty, He comes making the clouds His chariot. He rides on the wing of the clouds. Now you've got to understand something. As you go into your New Testament, how are we told that the Lord Jesus will be returning at that last day? He's coming in the clouds. In Matthew chapter 24, when Jesus is being interrogated by the High Priest, what's one of the things that He says to the High Priest? "You will see me coming in the clouds, seated at the right hand of Power." And those were the words that the High Priest used to condemn Jesus, saying that Jesus was blaspheming. He was saying that because Jesus claims to be coming in the clouds, Jesus was therefore claiming to be God. And on that basis, the High Priest passed his sentence of death upon Jesus.

We won't look any further, but there are many other references to this idea of God coming in the clouds—the LORD, or Yahweh, appearing in clouds and thick darkness. And we're told now that He's going to pay a visit to Egypt, and the idols of Egypt, back into Isaiah chapter 19, will tremble at His presence. Did you know that the word "idols" in its literal meaning just means "nothings." The nothings of Egypt—"the nothings of Egypt will tremble at his presence." These things that would call themselves gods, these pretenders that claimed to be gods and claimed to be the protectors of their people—they're nothings. And they will tremble at the presence of God, "and the heart of the Egyptians will melt within them."

And then we see the judgment of God falling upon Egypt. Civil war: I will stir up Egyptians against Egyptians, each against his neighbor, kingdom and city against each other. The spirit of the Egyptians being poured out down, in verse 3. And they will still turn to their dark and evil religions. They'll inquire of their idols and their sorcerers, the mediums and the necromancers, even in the face of defeat.

Think, for example, of the picture that we're given in the story of Sodom and Gomorrah back in Genesis, when the Lord is going to rain destruction upon these cities because of their evil and their uncleanness. An angel of the Lord, it says, strikes all the men of the city with blindness because they're trying to destroy Lot and his family. He strikes all the men of the city with blindness. Well you would think, wouldn't you, that if you've been struck with blindness, you'd give up. You'd realize, "This is a battle I can't win. There's something going on here that I can't overcome." But no, it says they kept groping for the door. They kept trying to get there, even in their blindness they kept trying to get there—trying to do the thing that they set out to do.

And that's the picture here. The idolaters, even in the face of complete destruction, won't turn away from the only thing they've known. They won't turn away from their wickedness, their dark arts. They won't turn away from the occult—mediums and necromancers. Let's have a look particularly at verse 4: "I will give over the Egyptians into the hand of a hard master, and a fierce king will rule over them, declares the Lord GOD of hosts."

You know, we took our reading earlier in the book of Jeremiah, looking in chapters 43 and 44. And what did God promise there concerning Egypt? Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, would set up his throne in the very middle of Egypt, and there he would cast judgment upon the Egyptians. And this picture of a fierce king is seen often in Scripture.

Turn quickly, for example, to the book of Exodus, chapter 1. At the start of the book of Exodus, we're told there's something different going on here. Verse 8 tells us that the people of Israel are in Egypt, that they increased greatly, but then Joseph died. Exodus 1:8: "Now there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph." There arose a new king, an evil king.

Move forward to Exodus chapter 5, and we find out more about this king. Looking at verse 2: "2 But Pharaoh said, 'Who is the LORD, that I should obey his voice and let Israel go? I do not know the LORD, and moreover, I will not let Israel go.'" He does not know God. He's a hard king. Remember, he's the king who told the midwives to destroy all the male children of Israel. He's the king who told the taskmasters to tell the workers to be making bricks without straw—

work harder, in other words. He's the king who made things hard. Remember our reading in Jeremiah 43, regarding the fact that there's going to come an even harsher king—one who's not even an Egyptian, Nebuchadnezzar, with the power of life and death in his hand—and it says that he's going to clean out Egypt, like you clean vermin off a cloak. He's going to scrape them off.

The Bible's filled with harsh king-type figures. Turn to the book of Daniel, chapter 11, and there we're just going to look at verses 36 to 39. Now this king in the book of Daniel appears to be very clearly and openly an antichrist-type figure. Daniel chapter 11, starting at verse 36:

“³⁶ And the king shall do as he wills. He shall exalt himself and magnify himself above every god, and shall speak astonishing things against the God of gods. He shall prosper till the indignation is accomplished; for what is decreed shall be done. ³⁷ He shall pay no attention to the gods of his fathers, or to the one beloved by women. He shall not pay attention to any other god, for he shall magnify himself above all. ³⁸ He shall honor the god of fortresses instead of these. A god whom his fathers did not know he shall honor with gold and silver, with precious stones and costly gifts. ³⁹ He shall deal with the strongest fortresses with the help of a foreign god. Those who acknowledge him he shall load with honor. He shall make them rulers over many and shall divide the land for a price.”

And you see what God is saying through the prophet Daniel: A king is coming—this antichrist figure, this evil king—who is a harsh and a fierce king, and he shall rule over all that he desires. Why? For God has given it to him. He shall accomplish the things that he wants to do until the will of God is fulfilled. And God tells us here in the book of Isaiah that the Egyptians are being handed over to a fierce king. Now who's the fierce king behind all fierce kings? We know the person. You know what he's called—he's the Devil. He sets up the powers of the earth in rebellion against the living God.

We'll look at one more passage, this time in the New Testament. Go to First John chapter 5, verse 19. What does John say? “We know that we are from God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.” We know that we are from God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one. Now I ask you to think about that verse and what the apostle John is saying there. First of all, is the church under the power of the evil one? No, No. Are God's people, therefore, under the power of the evil one? No. Scripture tells us that.

So what's John saying there when he speaks of the “world”? Is it one of those literal worlds, which literally means everything on this globe? Or is he speaking of the world that is the system—the system of the world, the peoples of the world, the nature of the world? He's speaking of the system, isn't he—the world is a political, religious system. All the world is under the power of whom? It's under the power of the evil one. And back in Isaiah chapter 19, God tells us He's going to place Egypt under the power of a fierce king, under the power of a worldly king—one who is evil.

Verses 5 to 15 are all pictures of God's judgment upon the gods of Egypt. I need to say that more carefully. We're told that God is going to destroy Egypt, He's going to destroy the idols of Egypt, and He's going to destroy the counsel that people were getting through their occultic worship of false gods. Well, verses 5 to 15 are a demonstration of God's power over the false

gods of Egypt. You see, everything had a god, and in a way, almost everything was a god. The river was god, and there was a god of the river. And all of life in Egypt was based around the river—the river and the sun. Why? Well, you need water and you need light to grow your food. And these idolatrous worshippers were worshippers of the river and the sun.

So here God says He's going to destroy the very things they worship. "You think the river's a god? I'll dry the river up. You think the sun's a god? I'll use the sun to destroy your prosperity. You think Pharaoh provides your food? I'm going to destroy your food sources. I'm going to destroy all the powers that are over Egypt that the Egyptians once thought were gods." God's going to enact His judgment upon Egypt and destroy its gods. He's done this before, hasn't He?

For example, let's turn to Exodus chapter 12 and verse 12: "For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am the LORD." The Passover was God's judgment upon the false gods. The destruction of the firstborn was God's judgment upon the false gods that were supposedly the protection and the blessing of the firstborn. God says, "I'm going to pass judgment on those gods, and to prove that I'm judging those gods, I'm going to destroy the ones those gods are supposedly preserving." God's passing judgment upon Egypt.

Let's keep reading, Isaiah chapter 19, verse 22. "And the LORD will strike Egypt, striking and healing, and they will return to the LORD, and he will listen to their pleas for mercy and heal them." We don't see that in the world today, do we? We don't imagine that. We don't understand that. In this destruction of Egypt that is going to happen, in this striking of this evil nation, God is using the disaster to call forth His faithful. God trades off the world against His own people. He sacrifices nations for the benefit of His elect. And so here we're told, God strikes Egypt and heals. And they will return to the Lord, and He will listen to their pleas for mercy and help them. He strikes and He heals.

Let's have a look at a few verses that give this idea that God strikes and heals, this idea of God's mercy. Start at the book of Proverbs, chapter 3, verses 11 and 12: "¹¹ My son, do not despise the LORD's discipline or be weary of his reproof, ¹² for the LORD reproves him whom he loves, as a father the son in whom he delights." What's he saying? If you're being disciplined by God, it's because God loves you. If you're under God's discipline, you're being disciplined because God wants to build you up.

Turn to the book of Hosea, chapter 6. We'll start reading at verse 1: "Come, let us return to the LORD; for he has torn us, that he may heal us; he has struck us down, and he will bind us up. ² After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will raise us up, that we may live before him." Who struck them down? The Lord. Who tore them? The Lord. Why? That He may heal them, that He may bind them, that He may lift them up.

We took our New Testament reading earlier from Hebrews chapter 12, and what was the message in Hebrews chapter 12? The Lord disciplines those whom He loves. And when we're under His discipline, we're being treated as children. He strikes His own children, in love. We're not to fear God, in terms of fearing His destruction. He's promised He'll never destroy

those who are His. He's given eternal life to His own people. But we are to fear Him, for He is truly a father—a father who corrects and who disciplines—God striking in mercy.

Flip back into Isaiah chapter 19. The next bit I want us to pay some attention to is verse 23, and as I've already mentioned, to this concept of a highway. Isaiah 19:23: "In that day there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria, and Assyria will come into Egypt, and Egypt into Assyria, and the Egyptians will worship with the Assyrians." What's this saying? Well, my understanding is that God is going to be sending His people out into all the earth, preaching the Gospel to all the nations, and people from those nations will be called into the worship of the living God.

Now you're probably wondering how I get to that conclusion, and that's fair enough. Let's try and trace out an idea through Isaiah into the New Testament. Go back to Isaiah chapter 11. Isaiah chapter 11 is one of the major Old Testament prophecies concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. We'll just look at the first two verses to get that clear in our mind. Isaiah 11: "1 There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit. 2 And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD."

Now the "shoot from the stump of Jesse." Well, Jesse was the father of King David, and it's a way of saying, He's going to come forth from the line of David. The Messiah was called the Son of David. So we have here a prophecy of the coming of Jesus—in His wisdom, in His righteousness, with the Spirit of the Lord resting upon Him. Remember when He was baptized, we're told that the Holy Spirit rested upon Him and stayed upon Him.

Now move forward to Isaiah 11, verse 10: "In that day the root of Jesse, who shall stand as a signal for the peoples—of him shall the nations inquire, and his resting place shall be glorious." So what's he saying? Isaiah's telling us that the Saviour's going to come. He's going to come from the line of David. He's going to be the Saviour that comes from the line of David, called the Son of David. Verse 10 tells us He's going to be a signal for all the peoples—"of him shall the nations inquire."

Continuing to read from Isaiah 11, starting at verse 15: "And the LORD will utterly destroy the tongue of the Sea of Egypt, and will wave his hand over the River with his scorching breath, and strike it into seven channels, and he will lead people across in sandals. 16 And there will be a highway from Assyria for the remnant that remains of his people, as there was for Israel when they came up from the land of Egypt."

If you can remember back to when we looked at this passage, we talked about the fact that this was Exodus-type language—"a highway for the remnant that remains of his people, as there was for Israel when they came up from the land of Egypt." Now that wasn't a literal highway. The Israelites wandered through the desert for forty years. It wasn't a stamped-out, marked-out, signposted highway. And yet here in the book of Isaiah, we're told that that's a highway—the highway from slavery to the Promised Land.

Let's keep looking at this idea of highway. I want you now to move in the book of Isaiah to Isaiah chapter 35. I'll start reading back at verse 1. Once again, this is a prophecy of a time

coming when God's blessings shall be poured out upon the earth. Isaiah 35:1: "¹ The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad; the desert shall rejoice and blossom like the crocus; ² it shall blossom abundantly and rejoice with joy and singing. The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it, the majesty of Carmel and Sharon. They shall see the glory of the LORD, the majesty of our God. ³ Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees. ⁴ Say to those who have an anxious heart, 'Be strong; fear not! Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God. He will come and save you.'

"⁵ Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; ⁶ then shall the lame man leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy. For waters break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert; ⁷ the burning sand shall become a pool, and the thirsty ground springs of water; in the haunt of jackals, where they lie down, the grass shall become reeds and rushes. ⁸ And a highway shall be there, and it shall be called the Way of Holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it. It shall belong to those who walk on the way; even if they are fools, they shall not go astray."

And a highway shall be there. It will be called "the Way of Holiness." The unclean will not pass over it. Even if the people walking on this Way of Holiness are fools, they shall not go astray. What's this highway? It's the highway that leads to the very presence of God.

Now how is that picked up and used in the New Testament? Well, we're going to get there in a moment, but let's just look at one more passage. In the book of Isaiah, move forward now to Isaiah chapter 40. Once again, we're in Messianic prophecy here—verses 1 and 2. How do we know it's Messianic prophecy? Because when John the Baptist preached, these were the passages that he used, and we're told that in Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

Isaiah 40, verse 1: "Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. ² Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins. ³ A voice cries: 'In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God.'"

When Christ comes to the people, He's coming along what's pictured here as a way, or a highway. He comes along a highway. We've got the people on a highway coming to God, we've got Christ coming to the people along a way, or a highway. What did Jesus say of Himself? "I am the way, the truth, and the life. I am the way."

So now we've picked up some of this idea of highway in our Old Testament, let's go and pick it up in the New Testament. Turn to the book of Matthew, chapter 3, and we'll start at verse 1: "¹ In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, ² 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.' ³ For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah when he said, 'The voice of one crying in the wilderness: "Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight.'"

There's a reference back to Isaiah chapter 40, which we have just read, and now it's being used in Matthew chapter 3, and applied to the coming of the Lord Jesus. And if you're wondering, Why aren't the words exactly the same? It's because the quotation there is from the Septuagint,

it's from the ancient Greek. And you've got that slight little change as it comes from the Old into the New, via the Septuagint. But it is that passage being quoted. Highway—way—a pathway, in all of these things it's saying, "Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight." There it is quoted in the New Testament.

But now I want you to move to the book of Acts, chapter 24. This is Paul giving his defense. He's been accused by the Jews, and the Jews had appointed a spokesman named Tertullus. Paul is giving his defense to Felix. Let's start reading at Acts chapter 24, the second half of verse 10:

"¹⁰ ...Paul replied: 'Knowing that for many years you have been a judge over this nation, I cheerfully make my defense. ¹¹ You can verify that it is not more than twelve days since I went up to worship in Jerusalem, ¹² and they did not find me disputing with anyone or stirring up a crowd, either in the temple or in the synagogues or in the city. ¹³ Neither can they prove to you what they now bring up against me. ¹⁴ But this I confess to you, that according to the Way, which they call a sect, I worship the God of our fathers, believing everything laid down by the Law and written in the Prophets.'"

"According to the Way"—and that word there that's been translated for us "Way" is exactly the same word that's used back in Matthew chapter 3, verse 3—the Way, which is the quotation of Isaiah chapter 40. And notice that Paul gives it a title—"I confess to you, that according to the Way. He's saying he's on the Way. What Way? He's on Isaiah's way, the highway that is the highway of God's prophetic fulfillment—the highway that we could be calling Salvation. He's on the highway by which God comes to His people, and by which God's people follow Christ into the very presence of God.

That's my explanation of the phrase that we see back in Isaiah chapter 19, "²³ In that day there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria, and Assyria will come into Egypt, and Egypt into Assyria, and the Egyptians will worship with the Assyrians." Remember back in Isaiah chapter 11, when Isaiah speaks of the coming of the shoot that comes forth from the stump of Jesse, he speaks of peace. Remember the picture of animals—the wolf will dwell with the lamb, and the leopard lie down with the young goat, and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together. And I suggested to you then that this was a picture of peace—clean dwelling safely with unclean; or wild dwelling safely with the tame; or the hunter dwelling peacefully with the prey. And here we have more of that picture. For Egypt and Assyria, though they were pictures of the world, were also always enemies—always fighting. And yet now, there are people from these nations who are coming to the worship of the living God.

So let's now come basically to where I wanted to get, as I addressed these things. Who's God speaking to here? Well obviously, we know that. He's speaking to Egypt. But I want you to cast your thoughts forward a bit and back a bit, back in Isaiah chapter 19. Remember first of all, last week as we looked at Isaiah chapter 18, it starts off in verse 1 with Isaiah speaking to Cush, an African nation, which for a period of time actually ruled over the land of Egypt. But then Isaiah chapter 18, verse 3, tells us, "All you inhabitants of the world, you who dwell on the earth." God's speaking to Cush, who ruled over Egypt for a period of time, and he's speaking to the whole world.

Now just look forward into Isaiah chapter 20 at verse 5: “Then they shall be dismayed and ashamed because of Cush their hope and of Egypt their boast.” I’m suggesting to you that Isaiah in this whole section of his writings is addressing all the world. Though he speaks specifically of Egypt and things that will happen in Egypt, Egypt is and always has been a representation of all the world. The same people are being addressed through chapters 18, 19, and 20: Cush, Egypt, that whole part of the world.

Next, I want you to notice something about this highway of holiness, the highway of the worship of the living God. Though the passage makes reference to things that appear to be Exodus-type references—the idea that people will be called out of the land and into the worship of the living God—though they’re leaving Egypt, they’re staying in Egypt. Let’s have a look at that.

Looking at verses 19 to 22: “¹⁹ In that day”—now remember, “in that day.” What have we said about “in that day” before? “In that day” is the day of both judgment and blessing. It’s the day of the destruction of the Lord’s enemies, it’s the day of the salvation of the Lord’s people. “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 It will be a sign and a witness to the LORD of hosts in the land of Egypt. When they cry to the LORD because of oppressors, he will send them a savior and defender, and deliver them.”

Though they’re being saved out of Egypt, they’re not leaving Egypt. Think about that. The altar to the Lord will be in the midst of the land of Egypt. The pillar to the Lord will be at its border. They will cry to the Lord because of their oppressors, and what does it say about the Saviour? The Saviour will come to them. It doesn’t say they’re going to Jerusalem to meet God. It says the God of Jerusalem, who is the only Saviour in all of Scripture, is coming to Egypt to meet *them*. They’re going to be saved where they are.

That reminds me of the thing that our Lord Jesus says to the woman at the well in John chapter 4. Let’s just turn quickly there. She asks Him, “Well, you say I’m supposed to be a worshipper of the living God. I’m a Samaritan. Am I supposed to worship here? Or am I supposed to try and go to Jerusalem, and there be a worshipper of the living God?” We’ll just look at John chapter 4, verses 21 to 24:

“²¹ Jesus said to her, ‘Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. ²² You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. ²³ But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. ²⁴ God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.’”

What was Jesus’ answer to her question? “You don’t have to go to Jerusalem. You can worship the Lord God anywhere. You can worship God in Jerusalem, you can worship God in Samaria, or wherever you find yourself. You don’t go on pilgrimage to become a believer; you worship in spirit and truth, for God is spirit.” You must worship in spirit and truth, for God is spirit.

Well, flicking back to Isaiah chapter 19, these people who are being converted, these people who are being called with Exodus-type language, don't leave the place where they're at. Though it says there'll be a highway, if God has come to you in Egypt, if you've got your sacrifices going on in the midst of Egypt, if the Saviour and the defender has come to you where you are, why do you need to go elsewhere? The highway, I suggest once again, this highway is the highway of holiness, it's the way by which the Lord Jesus comes to us, and it's the way by which we follow the Lord Jesus—the way of faith and repentance.

So what have we got here? We've got some pretty amazing things happening in our chapter. Just look quickly at verses 24 and 25, the last verses in the chapter. ²⁴In that day Israel will be the third with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth, ²⁵whom the LORD of hosts has blessed, saying, 'Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel my inheritance.'" Blessed be whom? "Egypt my people."

What was Moses' message to the Egyptians, what was Moses' message to Pharaoh when God sent Moses into Egypt to deliver His people? Turn to Exodus chapter 5, verse 1. "Afterward Moses and Aaron went and said to Pharaoh, 'Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, "Let my people go, that they may hold a feast to me in the wilderness."'" Let my people go. But who's being called "my people"? It says back in Isaiah 19:25, "Blessed be Egypt my people." Things have been turned on their head, haven't they?

Moses goes to Egypt in Exodus chapter 5. The message from God is, "Let my people go." From where? From Egypt. "Get my people out of Egypt. Get them away from this place of slavery and destruction." And now Isaiah tells us in Isaiah chapter 19:25, "Blessed be Egypt my people"—and goes even further—"and Assyria the work of my hands." Assyria the work of my hands. Egypt, Assyria, or Babylon—and God calls these people the work of His hands, and Israel, "my inheritance." In Deuteronomy chapter 4, verse 34, God says He's saved His people by His outstretched hand. He saved His people by His outstretched hand.

So here we've got this picture of Egypt and Assyria and Israel, all being called God's people, the work of God's hands, and God's own inheritance. And I ask you, How can foreigners, how can people outside of the covenant nation, who are not descendants of Abraham—how is it that they become God's people? There's only one way. We know there's only one way that they become God's people. Let's refresh it in our memories. Galatians chapter 3, starting at verse 1:

"O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified. ²Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith? ³Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh? ⁴Did you suffer so many things in vain—if indeed it was in vain? ⁵Does he who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you do so by works of the law, or by hearing with faith—⁶just as Abraham 'believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness'? ⁷Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham." Who? It is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham.

Were the Galatians Jews by blood? No. One of the points of the whole letter to the Galatians is that you don't have to submit yourselves to the sign of the Jewish covenant, circumcision.

You're not the sons of Abraham by blood, but you are the sons of Abraham by what means? Faith—those of faith are the sons of Abraham. Move down to Galatians chapter 3, verse 29—the last verse in the chapter: “And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.” And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise.

So how is it that these Egyptians and these Assyrians are lumped in together with Israel, and are called God's blessed people, the work of God's hands? Well, there's only one way that foreigners or Gentiles can be lumped in with the people of God. There's only one way that anyone who is outside of the people of the Jews can come into and become a son of Abraham. And it's actually the same way that they were saved. There's only one way to be saved, there's only one way to be counted as a member of the covenant nation, and what is it? Faith. Faith in the living God, faith in the redeeming Saviour, faith in Christ. By that means, you become a member of God's chosen people.

Isaiah is speaking of things in the future. He's speaking of God gathering a church from all the world, and even the enemies, even those slated down for destruction, those places under the rule of an evil king—even those nations become, what? They become a fertile seedbed, from which God draws a harvest. He draws in the nations. He draws in His people.

Now let's just quickly wrap it up here. How do we know then, or is there anything else to indicate, that this is truly what's happening? Well I'm suggesting that there are four things from Isaiah chapter 19, verse 19 down to verse 22, that suggest to us that these people are truly converted. Let's have a look.

Verse 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.” Altar and pillar. Okay, what's that all about? Well turn to the book of Revelation, chapter 8. We'll start reading at verse 1:

“When the Lamb opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour.
² Then I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and seven trumpets were given to them.
³ And another angel came and stood at the altar with a golden censer, and he was given much incense to offer with the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar before the throne.”

We've got a picture here in the New Testament of our prayers being compared to incense, burnt upon a holy golden altar—a picture from Old Testament law, brought into New Testament fulfillment. Prayers, or the offering of prayers, the worship of the living God, is like incense—being likened to incense burnt on an altar.

Move back to Revelation chapter 3. We're in the letters to the churches, and I just want to look at Revelation 3:12, in the letter to the church at Philadelphia: “The one who conquers, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God. Never shall he go out of it, and I will write on him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down from my God out of heaven, and my own new name.”

Notice the use of the word “pillar.” The one who conquers, conquers what? Conquers the world, conquers Satan, conquers the synagogue of Satan, conquers sin. How do you conquer these things? Faith, patient endurance. You keep the Lord’s word, back at verse 10. “Because you have kept my word about patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world.” And what’s the reward? You will be “a pillar in the temple of my God.” And so in Isaiah 19, verse 19, we have an altar, we have a pillar—pictures that are picked up in the New Testament as fulfillment of faith.

In Isaiah 19, verse 20, we have what? Prayer. “It will be a sign and a witness to the LORD of hosts in the land of Egypt. When they cry to the LORD because of oppressors, he will send them a savior and defender, and deliver them.” Who prays? Honestly, who prays? In the eyes of the Lord, who are the people who pray? Only the faithful, only the people in whom is the Spirit of the living God. You’ve got an altar, you’ve got prayer. Let’s keep looking.

Isaiah 19, verse 21: “And the LORD will make himself known to the Egyptians, and the Egyptians will know the LORD in that day.” Revelation—God revealing Himself; God making Himself known. How does anyone know the Lord? How does anyone know God? There’s only one way, isn’t there? You don’t know God in any other way than knowing the eternally begotten Son of God, or the God who is at the Father’s side. For example, John chapter 1 verse 18 says: “No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known.” And the second half of verse 21: “they ... worship with sacrifice and offering, and they will make vows to the LORD and perform them.” They’re worshippers.

So my reading of Isaiah chapter 19 is this: In Isaiah’s day, there’s a kingdom or a nation called Egypt. It has always been the place of darkness and wickedness. Egypt has always been an enemy of the living God, and Egypt will be judged. The people who go down to Egypt after the destruction of Jerusalem will also be judged. They are fools. God will judge and destroy Egypt.

And yet, Isaiah can’t help but continually refer to the future, and the coming Saviour. Every time he speaks to us of judgment and God’s destruction of the evil ones, what does he also speak to us of? Salvation through faith in the coming Saviour. Salvation through faith in the coming Messiah. Lots of the language that he uses, I believe, is best interpreted figuratively. You may well disagree with me on that. We’ll live together in happiness and peace; we can handle that, all right? He’s preaching that gospel. He’s preaching the gospel again, and again, and again.

What’s the fulfillment, then, of Isaiah’s predictions? Well, where in the world has the gospel been preached that people have not been saved? There is no such place—Egypt and all the world, Babylon and all the world. When God says He’s going to destroy Babylon, what does He say about Babylon? “Come out of her, my people.” Even within Babylon, He has people. Why? Because they’re worshippers of the living God, and He’s calling them out of Babylon!

Scripture, I believe, is just one enormous narrative from start to finish of the coming Saviour. Scripture is Christ-centered. To understand Scripture, you have to understand it in a Christ-centered way. The incarnation, the coming of the Saviour, His life upon this earth, has to be at the very center of our view of God. We have to use the Old Testament prophecies according to the way that they were interpreted and applied in the New Testament. Even out of Egypt, that

land of darkness, they will cry to the Lord for salvation, and He will heal them. And that's the promise of the gospel to all the world.

My friends, we've got a message. It's the message of salvation. There is no way to be delivered from the judgment of God, apart from salvation in and through and by the Lord Jesus Christ. Whether you're an Egyptian, a Babylonian, or an Israelite—you've got to have faith in Christ. We'll close there.

Father in heaven, we do once again give you thanks and praise for your word, for the promises contained in Scripture. We thank you, Father, for all of the good things that we find. We thank you, Father, for the promise of Christ. We thank you that this promise has been fulfilled in His life, and has been fulfilled in and through His church, and the reign of Christ upon the earth is being fulfilled through the preaching of the gospel, as you call forth people from behind the gates of hell, and you call them to the Rock that is salvation, the Lord Jesus Christ. We thank you and we praise you for these things in Jesus' name. Amen.