

CHAPTER 19

As Assyria was a breaking rod to Judah, with which it was smitten, so Egypt was a broken reed, with which it was cheated; and therefore God had a quarrel with them both. We have before read the doom of the Assyrians; now here we have the burden of Egypt, a prophecy concerning that nation,

I. That it should be greatly weakened and brought low, and should be as contemptible among the nations as now it was considerable, rendered so by a complication of judgments which God would bring upon them (v. 1-17).

II. That at length God's holy religion should be brought into Egypt, and set up there, in part by the Jews that should flee thither for refuge, but more fully by the preachers of the gospel of Christ, through whose ministry churches should be planted in Egypt in the days of the Messiah (v. 18-25), which would abundantly balance all the calamities here threatened.

ISAIAH 19:1-17

THE DOOM OF EGYPT

Though the land of Egypt had of old been a house of bondage to the people of God, where they had been ruled with rigour, yet among the unbelieving Jews there still remained much of the humour of their fathers, who said, *Let us make us a captain and return into Egypt*. Upon all occasions they trusted to Egypt for help (²³⁰¹Isaiah 30:2), and thither they fled, in disobedience to God's express command, when things were brought to the last extremity in their own country, ²⁴⁴⁷Jeremiah 43:7. Rabshakeh upbraided Hezekiah with this, ²³⁰⁶Isaiah 36:6. While they kept up an alliance with Egypt, and it was a powerful ally, they stood not in awe of the judgments of God; for against them they depended upon Egypt to protect them. Nor did they depend upon the power of God when at any time they were in distress; but Egypt was their confidence. To prevent all this mischief, Egypt must be mortified, and many ways God here tells them he will take to mortify them.

I. The gods of Egypt shall appear to them to be what they always really were, utterly unable to help them, v. 1. “*The Lord rides upon a cloud, a swift cloud, and shall come into Egypt.* As a judge goes in state to the bench to try and condemn the malefactors, or as a general takes the field with his troops to crush the rebels, so shall God come into Egypt with his judgments; and when he comes he will certainly overcome.” In all this burden of Egypt here is no mention of any foreign enemy invading them; but God himself will come against them, and raise up the causes of their destruction from among themselves. He comes upon a cloud, above the reach of the opposition or resistance. He comes apace upon a swift cloud; for their judgment lingers not when the time has come. He *rides upon the wings of the wind*, with a majesty far excelling the greatest pomp and splendour of earthly princes. He *makes the clouds his chariots*, ~~OR~~ Psalm 18:9; 104:3. When he comes *the idols of Egypt shall be moved*, shall be removed at his presence, and perhaps be made to fall as Dagon did before the ark. Isis, Osiris, and Apis, those celebrated idols of Egypt, being found unable to relieve their worshippers, shall be disowned and rejected by them. Idolatry had got deeper rooting in Egypt than in any land besides, even the most absurd idolatries; and yet now the idols shall be moved and they shall be ashamed of them. When the Lord brought Israel out of Egypt he *executed judgments upon the gods of the Egyptians* (~~OR~~ Numbers 33:4); no marvel then if, when he comes, they begin to tremble. The Egyptians *shall seek to the idols*, when they are at their wits' end, and consult *the charmners and wizards* (v. 3); but all in vain; they see their ruin hastening on them notwithstanding.

II. The militia of Egypt, that had been famed for their valour, shall be quite dispirited and disheartened. No kingdom in the world was ever in a better method of keeping up a standing army than the Egyptians were; but now their heroes, that used to be celebrated for courage, shall be posted for cowards: *The heart of Egypt shall melt in the midst of it*, like wax before the fire (v. 1); *the spirit of Egypt shall fail*, v. 3. They shall have no inclination, no resolution, to stand up in defence of their country, their liberty, and property; but shall tamely and ingloriously yield all to the invader and oppressor. The Egyptians *shall be like women* (v. 16); they shall be frightened and put into confusion by the least alarm; even those that dwell in the heart of the country, in the midst of it, and therefore furthest from danger, will be as full of frights as those that are situate on the frontiers. Let not the bold and brave be proud or secure, for God can

easily *cut off the spirit of princes* (^{<3762>}Psalm 76:12) and *take away their hearts*, ^{<822>}Job 12:24.

III. The Egyptians shall be embroiled in endless dissensions and quarrels among themselves. There shall be no occasion to bring a foreign force upon them to destroy them; they shall destroy one another (v. 2): *I will set the Egyptians against the Egyptians*. As these divisions and animosities are their sin, God is not the author of them, they come from men's lusts; but God, as a Judge, permits them for their punishment, and by their destroying differences corrects them for their sinful agreements. Instead of helping one another, and acting each in his place for the common good, *they shall fight every one against his brother and neighbour*, whom he ought to love as himself — *city against city, and kingdom against kingdom*. Egypt was then divided into twelve provinces, or dynasties; but Psammetichus, the governor of one of them, by setting them at variance with one another, at length made himself master of them all. A kingdom thus divided against itself would soon be brought to desolation. *En quo discordif cives perduxit miseros!* — *Oh the wretchedness brought upon a people by their disagreements among themselves!* It is brought to this by a *perverse spirit*, a spirit of contradiction, which the Lord would mingle, as an intoxicating draught made up of several ingredients, for the Egyptians, v. 14. One party shall be for a thing for no other reason than because the other is against it; that is a *perverse spirit*, which, if it mingle with the public counsels, tends directly to the ruin of the public interests.

IV. Their politics shall be all blasted, and turned into foolishness. When God will destroy the nation he will *destroy the counsel thereof* (v. 3), by taking away wisdom from the statesmen (^{<822>}Job 12:20), or setting them one against another (as Hushai and Ahithophel), or by his providence breaking their measures even when they seemed well laid; so that the *princes of Zoan are fools*: they make fools of one another, every one betrays his own folly, and divine Providence makes fools of them all, v. 11. Pharaoh had his wise counsellors. Egypt was famous for such. But their *counsel has all become brutish*; they have lost all their forecast; one would think they had become idiots, and were bereaved of common sense. Let no man glory then in his own wisdom, nor depend upon that, nor upon the wisdom of those about him; for he that gives understanding can when he please take it away. And from those it is most likely to be taken away that boast of their policy, as Pharaoh's counsellors here did, and, to

recommend themselves to places of public trust, boast of their great understanding (“*I am the son of the wise*, of the God of wisdom, of wisdom itself,” says one; “my father was an eminent privy-counsellor of note in his day for wisdom”), or of the antiquity and dignity of their families: “I am,” says another, “*the son of ancient kings*.” The nobles of Egypt boasted much of their antiquity, producing fabulous records of their succession for above 10,000 years. This humour prevailed much among them about this time, as appears by Herodotus, their common boast being that Egypt was some thousands of years more ancient than any other nation. “But *where are thy wise men?* v. 12. Let them now show their wisdom by foreseeing what ruin is coming upon their nation, and preventing it, if they can. Let them with all their skill *know what the Lord of hosts has purposed upon Egypt*, and arm themselves accordingly. Nay, so far are they from doing this that they themselves are, in effect, contriving the ruin of Egypt, and hastening it on, v. 13. *The princes of Noph* are not only deceived themselves, but they *have seduced Egypt*, by putting their kings upon arbitrary proceedings” (by which both themselves and their people were soon undone); “the governors of Egypt, that are the stay and cornerstones of the tribes thereof, are themselves undermining it.” It is sad with a people when those that undertake for their safety are helping forward their destruction, and the physicians of the state are her worst disease, when the things that belong to the public peace are so far hidden from the eyes of those that are entrusted with the public counsels that in every thing they blunder and take wrong measures; so here (v. 14): *They have caused Egypt to err in every work thereof*. Every step they took was a false step. They always mistook either the end or the means, and their counsels were all unsteady and uncertain, like the staggerings and stammerings of a drunken man in his vomit, who knows not what he says nor where he goes. See what reason we have to pray for our privy-counsellors and ministers of state, who are the great supports and blessings of the state if God give them a spirit of wisdom, but quite the contrary if he hide their heart from understanding.

V. The rod of government shall be turned into the serpent of tyranny and oppression (v. 4): “*The Egyptians will I give over into the hand of a cruel lord*, not a foreigner, but one of their own, one that shall rule over them by an hereditary right, but shall be a fierce king and rule them with rigour,” either the twelve tyrants that succeeded Sethon, or rather Psammetichus that recovered the monarchy again; for he speaks of one cruel lord. Now

the barbarous usage which the Egyptian task masters gave to God's Israel long ago was remembered against them and they were paid in their own coin by another Pharaoh. It is sad with a people when the powers that should be for edification are for destruction, and they are ruined by those by whom they should be ruled, when such as this is the manner of the king, as it is described (*in terrorem — in order to impress alarm*), ⁽⁻⁰⁰⁸¹⁾1 Samuel 8:11.

VI. Egypt was famous for its river Nile, which was its wealth, and strength, and beauty, and was idolized by them. Now it is here threatened that *the waters shall fail from the sea* and the river shall be *wasted and dried up*, v. 5. Nature shall not herein favour them as she has done. Egypt was never watered with the rain of heaven (⁽⁻³³⁴⁸⁾Zechariah 14:18), and therefore the fruitfulness of their country depended wholly upon the overflowing of their river; if that therefore be dried up, their fruitful land will soon be turned into barrenness and their harvests cease: *Every thing sown by the brooks will wither* of course, *will be driven away, and be no more*, v. 7. If the paper-reeds by the brooks, at the very mouth of them, wither, much more the corn, which lies at a greater distance, but derives its moisture from them. Yet this is not all; the drying up of their rivers is the destruction,

1. Of their fortifications, for they are *brooks of defence* (v. 6), making the country difficult of access to an enemy. Deep rivers are the strongest lines, and most hardly forced. Pharaoh is said to be a *great dragon lying in the midst of his rivers*, and guarded by them, bidding defiance to all about him, ⁽⁻³²⁹⁸⁾Ezekiel 29:3. But these *shall be emptied and dried up*, not by an enemy, as Sennacherib with the *sole of his foot dried up mighty rivers* (⁽⁻²⁵⁰⁵⁾Isaiah 37:25), and as Cyrus, who took Babylon by drawing Euphrates into many streams, but by the providence of God, which sometimes *turns water-springs into dry ground*, ⁽⁻²⁴⁷³⁾Psalms 107:33.

2. It is the destruction of their fish, which in Egypt was much of their food, witness that base reflection which the children of Israel made (⁽⁻⁰¹¹⁵⁾Numbers 11:5): *We remember the fish which we did eat in Egypt freely*. The drying up of the rivers will *kill the fish* (⁽⁻⁰⁴⁵⁹⁾Psalms 105:29), and will thereby ruin those who make it their business,

(1.) To catch fish, whether by angling or nets (v. 8); they shall *lament and languish*, for their trade is at an end. There is nothing which the children

of this world do more heartily lament than the loss of that which they used to get money by. *Ploratur lachrymis amissa pecunia veris* — *Those are genuine tears which are shed over lost money.*

(2.) To keep fish, that it may be ready when it is called for. There were those that *made sluices and ponds for fish* (v. 10), but *they shall be broken in the purposes thereof*; their business will fail, either for want of water to fill their ponds or for want of fish to replenish their waters. God can find ways to deprive a country even of that which is its staple commodity. The Egyptians may themselves remember *the fish they have formerly eaten freely*, but now cannot have for money. And that which aggravates the loss of these advantages by the river is that it is their own doing (v. 6): *They shall turn the rivers far away*. Their kings and great men, to gratify their own fancy, will drain water from the main river to their own houses and grounds at a distance, preferring their private convenience before the public good, and so by degrees the force of the river is sensibly weakened. Thus many do themselves a greater prejudice at last than they think of,

[1.] Who pretend to be wiser than nature, and to do better for themselves than nature has done.

[2.] Who consult their own particular interest more than the common good. Such may gratify themselves, but surely they can never satisfy themselves, who to serve a turn contribute to a public calamity, which they themselves, in the long run, cannot avoid sharing in. Herodotus tells us that Pharaoh-Necho (who reigned not long after this), projecting to cut a free passage by water from Nilus into the Red Sea, employed a vast number of men to make a ditch or channel for that purpose, in which attempt he impaired the river, lost 120,000 of his people, and yet left the work unaccomplished.

VII. Egypt was famous for the linen manufacture; but that trade shall be ruined. Solomon's merchants traded with Egypt for linen-yarn, ¹ Kings 10:28. Their country produced the best flax and the best hands to work it; but *those that work in fine flax shall be confounded* (v. 9), either for want of flax to work on or for want of a demand for that which they have worked or opportunity to export it. The decay of trade weakens and wastes a nation and by degrees brings it to ruin. The trade of Egypt must needs sink, for (v. 15) *there shall not be any work for Egypt to be employed in*; and where there is nothing to be done there is nothing to be got. There

shall be a universal stop put to business, *no work which either head or tail, branch or rush, may do*; nothing for high or low, weak or strong, to do; no hire, ³⁸⁰Zechariah 8:10. Note, The flourishing of a kingdom depends much upon the industry of the people; and *then* things are likely to do well when all hands are at work, when the head and top-branch do not disdain to labour, and the labour of the tail and rush is not disdained. But when the learned professions are unemployed, the principal merchants have no stocks, and the handicraft tradesmen nothing to do, poverty comes upon a people *as one that travaileth and as an armed man*.

VIII. A general consternation shall seize the Egyptians; they *shall be afraid and fear* (v. 16), which will be both an evidence of a universal decay and a means and presage of utter ruin. Two things will put them into this fright: —

1. What they hear from *the land of Judah*; that *shall be a terror to Egypt*, v. 17. When they hear of the desolations made in Judah by the army of Sennacherib, considering both the near neighbourhood and the strict alliance that was between them and Judah, they will conclude it must be their turn next to become a prey to that victorious army. When their neighbour's house was on fire they could not but see their own in danger; and therefore every one of the Egyptians that makes mention of Judah shall be afraid of himself, expecting the bitter cup shortly to be put into his hands.

2. What they see in their own land. They shall *fear* (v. 16) *because of the shaking of the hand of the Lord of hosts*, and (v. 17) *because of the counsel of the Lord of hosts*, which from the shaking of his hand they shall conclude *he has determined* against Egypt as well as Judah. For, if judgment begin at the house of God, where will it end? *If this be done in the green tree, what shall be done in the dry?* See here,

(1.) How easily God can make those a terror to themselves that have been, not only secure, but a terror to all about them. It is but shaking his hand over them, or laying it upon some of their neighbours, and the stoutest hearts tremble immediately.

(2.) How well it becomes us to fear before God when he does but shake his hand over us, and to humble ourselves under his mighty hand when it does but threaten us, especially when we see his counsel determined against us; for who can change his counsel?

~~2308~~ ISAIAH 19:18-25

PROMISES TO EGYPT

Out of the thick and threatening clouds of the foregoing prophecy the sun of comfort here breaks forth, and it is the sun of righteousness. Still God has mercy in store for Egypt, and he will show it, not so much by reviving their trade and replenishing their river again as by bringing the true religion among them, calling them to, and accepting them in, the worship of the one only living and true God; and these blessings of grace were much more valuable than all the blessings of nature wherewith Egypt was enriched. We know not of any event in which this prophecy can be thought to have its full accomplishment short of the conversion of Egypt to the faith of Christ, by the preaching (as is supposed) of Mark the Evangelist, and the founding of many Christian churches there, which flourished for many ages. Many prophecies of this book point to the days of the Messiah; and why not this? It is no unusual thing to speak of gospel graces and ordinances in the language of the Old-Testament institutions. And, in these prophecies, those words, *in that day*, perhaps have not always a reference to what goes immediately before, but have a peculiar significancy pointing at that day which had been so long fixed, and so often spoken of, when the day-spring from on high should visit this dark world. Yet it is not improbable (which some conjecture) that this prophecy was in part fulfilled when those Jews who fled from their own country to take shelter in Egypt, when Sennacherib invaded their land, brought their religion along with them, and, being awakened to great seriousness by the troubles they were in, made an open and zealous profession of it there, and were instrumental to bring many of the Egyptians to embrace it, which was an earnest and specimen of the more plentiful harvest of souls that should be gathered in to God by the preaching of the gospel of Christ. Josephus indeed tells us that Onias the son of Onias the high priest, living an outlaw at Alexandria in Egypt, obtained leave of Ptolemy Philometer, then king, and Cleopatra his queen, to build a temple to the God of Israel, like that at Jerusalem, at Bubastis in Egypt, and pretended a warrant for doing it from this prophecy in Isaiah, that there shall be an *altar to the Lord in the land of Egypt*; and the service of God, Josephus affirms, continued in it about 333 years, when it was shut up by Paulinus soon after the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans; see *Antiq.* 13.62-79, and

Jewish War 7.426-436. But that temple was all along looked upon by the pious Jews as so great an irregularity, and an affront to the temple at Jerusalem, that we cannot suppose this prophecy to be fulfilled in it.

Observe how the conversion of Egypt is here described.

I. They shall *speak the language of Canaan*, the holy language, the scripture-language; they shall not only understand it, but use it (v. 18); they shall introduce that language among them, and converse freely with the people of God, and not, as they used to do, *by an interpreter*, ⁽⁴²³⁾Genesis 42:23. Note, Converting grace, by changing the heart, changes the language; *for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks*. *Five cities in Egypt* shall speak this language; so many Jews shall come to reside in Egypt, and they shall so multiply there, that they shall soon replenish five cities, one of which shall be the city of Heres, or of the sun, Heliopolis, where the sun was worshipped, the most infamous of all the cities of Egypt for idolatry; even there shall be a wonderful reformation, they shall speak the language of Canaan. Or it may be taken thus, as we render it — That for every five cities that shall embrace religion there shall be one (a sixth part of the cities of Egypt) that shall reject it, and that shall be called *a city of destruction*, because it refuses the methods of salvation.

II. They shall swear to the Lord of hosts, not only swear by him, giving him the honour of appealing to him, as all nations did to the gods they worshipped; but they shall by a solemn oath and vow devote themselves to his honour and bind themselves to his service. They shall swear to cleave to him with purpose of heart, and shall worship him, not occasionally, but constantly. They shall swear allegiance to him as their King, to Christ, to whom all judgment is committed.

III. They shall set up the public worship of God in their land (v. 19): *There shall be an altar to the Lord in the midst of the land of Egypt*, an altar on which *they shall do sacrifice and oblation* (v. 21); therefore it must be understood spiritually. Christ, the great altar, who sanctifies every gift, shall be owned there, and the gospel sacrifices of prayer and praise shall be offered up; for by the law of Moses there was to be no altar for sacrifice but that at Jerusalem. In Christ Jesus all distinction of nations is taken away; and a spiritual altar, a gospel church, in the midst of the land of Egypt, is as acceptable to God as one in the midst of the land of Israel;

and spiritual sacrifices of faith and love, and a contrite heart, *please the Lord better than an ox or bullock.*

IV. There shall be a face of religion upon the nation, and an open profession made of it, discernible to all who come among them. Not only in the heart of the country, but even in *the borders* of it, *there shall be a pillar*, or pillars, inscribed, *To Jehovah*, to his honour, as before there had been such pillars set up in honour of false gods. As soon as a stranger entered upon the borders of Egypt he might perceive what God they worshipped. Those that serve God must not be ashamed to own him, but be forward to do any thing that may be for a sign and for a witness to the Lord of hosts. Even in the land of Egypt he had some faithful worshippers, who boasted of their relation to him and made his name their strong tower, or bulwark, on their borders, with which their coasts were fortified against all assailants.

V. Being in distress, they shall seek to God, and he shall be found of them; and this *shall be a sign and a witness for the Lord of hosts* that he is a *God hearing prayer to all flesh that come to him*, v. 20. See ~~CHR~~ Psalm 65:2. When they cry to God by reason of their oppressors, the cruel lords that shall *rule over them* (v. 4) he *shall be entreated of them* (v. 22); whereas he had told his people Israel, who had made it their own choice to have such a king, that they should *cry to him by reason of their king*, and he *would not hear them*, ~~CHR~~ 1 Samuel 8:18.

VI. They shall have an interest in the great Redeemer. When they were under the oppression of cruel lords perhaps God sometimes raised them up mighty deliverers, as he did for Israel in the days of the judges; and by them, though he had smitten the land, he healed it again; and, upon their return to God in a way of duty, he returned to them in a way of mercy, and repaired the breaches of their tottering state. For repenting Egyptians shall find the same favour with God that repenting Ninevites did. But all these deliverances wrought for them, as those for Israel, were but figures of gospel salvation. Doubtless Jesus Christ is *the Saviour and the great one* here spoken of, whom God will send the glad tidings of to the Egyptians, and by whom he will *deliver them out of the hands of their enemies*, that they may *serve him without fear*, ~~CHR~~ Luke 1:74, 75. Jesus Christ delivered the Gentile nations from the service of dumb idols, and did himself both purchase and preach liberty to the captives.

VII. The knowledge of God shall prevail among them, v. 21.

1. They shall have the means of knowledge. For many ages in *Judah only was God known*, for there only were the lively oracles found; but now *the Lord*, and his name and will, *shall be known to Egypt*. Perhaps this may in part refer to the translation of the Old Testament out of Hebrew into Greek by the Septuagint, which was done at Alexandria in Egypt, by the command of Ptolemy king of Egypt; and it was the first time that the scriptures were translated into any other language. By the help of this (the Grecian monarchy having introduced their language into that country) *the Lord was known to Egypt*, and a happy omen and means it was of his being further known.

2. They shall have grace to improve those means. It is promised not only that the Lord shall be known to Egypt, but that *the Egyptians shall know the Lord*; they shall receive and entertain the light granted to them, and shall submit themselves to the power of it. The Lord is known to our nation, and yet I fear there are many of our nation that do not know the Lord. But the promise of the new covenant is that *all shall know the Lord, from the least even to the greatest*, which promise is sure to all the seed. The effect of this knowledge of God is that *they shall vow a vow to the Lord and perform it*. For those do not know God aright who either are not willing to come under binding obligations to the Lord or do not make good those obligations.

VIII. They shall come into the communion of saints. Being joined to the Lord, they shall be added to the church, and be incorporated with all the saints.

1. All enmities shall be slain. Mortal feuds there had been between Egypt and Assyria; they often made war upon one another; but now *there shall be a highway between Egypt and Assyria* (v. 23), a happy correspondence settled between the two nations; they shall trade with one another, and every thing that passes between them shall be friendly. *The Egyptians shall serve* (shall worship the true God) *with the Assyrians*; and therefore the Assyrians shall come into Egypt and the Egyptians into Assyria. Note, It becomes those who have communion with the same God, through the same Mediator, to keep up an amicable correspondence with one another. The consideration of our meeting at the same throne of grace, and our

serving with each other in the same business of religion, should put an end to all heats and animosities, and knit our hearts to each other in holy love.

2. The Gentile nations shall not only unite with each other in the gospel fold under Christ the great shepherd, but they shall all be united with the Jews. When Egypt and Assyria become partners in serving God *Israel shall make a third with them* (v. 24); they shall become a *three-fold cord, not easily broken*. The ceremonial law, which had long been the partition-wall between Jews and Gentiles, shall be taken down, and then they shall become *one sheep-fold under one shepherd*. Thus united, they shall be *a blessing in the midst of the land, whom the Lord of hosts shall bless*, v. 24, 25.

(1.) Israel shall be a blessing to them all, because of *them, as concerning the flesh, Christ came*, and they were the natural branches of the good olive, to whom did originally pertain *its root and fatness*, and the Gentiles were but *grafted in among them*, ^{<small>Romans 11:17}. Israel lay between Egypt and Assyria, and was a blessing to them both by bringing them to meet in that word of the Lord which went forth from Jerusalem, and that church which was first set up in the land of Israel. *Qui conveniunt in aliquo tertio inter se conveniunt — Those who meet in a third meet in each other*. Israel is that third in whom Egypt and Assyria agree, and is therefore a blessing; for those are real and great blessings to their generation who are instrumental to unite those that have been at variance.

(2.) They shall all be a blessing to the world: so the Christian church is, made up of Jews and Gentiles; it is the beauty, riches, and support of the world.

(3.) They shall all be blessed of the Lord.

[1.] They shall all be owned by him as his. Though Egypt was formerly a house of bondage to the people of God, and Assyria an unjust invader of them, all this shall now be forgiven and forgotten, and they shall be as welcome to God as Israel. They are all alike his people whom he takes under his protection. They are formed by him, for they are the *work of his hands*; not only as *a* people, but as *his* people. They are formed for him; for they are his inheritance, precious in his eyes, and dear to him, and from whom he has his rent of honour out of this lower world.

[2.] They shall be owned together by him as jointly his, his in concert; they shall all share in one and the same blessing. Note, Those that are united in the love and blessing of God ought, for that reason, to be united to each other in charity.