

“Blessed is Egypt, My People” – Isaiah 19-20

Introduction – The story of Egypt and Israel goes all the way back to the Patriarchs. Egypt, with its fertile Nile, had been a stable place to go in times of trouble. Abraham and Jacob both went down to Egypt to escape famines and the generations following Joseph found Egypt to be the place where Israel grew up into a mighty nation (Exodus 1:7). And then there was a different story, a story of great oppression and slavery and the rising up of a mighty savior to deliver Israel from Pharaoh (Exodus 1-15). Egypt was a great enemy of God’s people, but even in the exodus Moses spoke of a hope for Egypt (Deut 23:7-8), a hope David would sing of in the Psalms (i.e. 68:28-35). In these chapters of Isaiah we see the true bearing of the oracles against Egypt as a case in point of the Lord’s purpose to unite the enemies of His people and even the entire world in His worship. The promises in the midst of His judgments are breathtaking, revealing the wideness of God’s mercy and the wildness of His grace.

The Burden Against Egypt (19:1-15) – Isaiah warns Judah against turning to Egypt for an anti-Assyria alliance. She has boasted in her ancient gods, but they will not stop the chariot of the LORD riding down upon her. As the idols fall, they will set their followers against one another, bringing civil war (vv1-2). In a panic, they will turn from their gods to any ghost or demon, but will be subdued by cruel masters (vv3-4). The economic security of the Nile will be wasted and dried up and this will ruin all forms of trade and prosperity, leaving the people “sick of heart” (vv5-10). The LORD will have done this (v12b) but it will have occurred as well because of the foolish policies of the Egyptian “Cabinet” (vv11-15). Egypt, a “modern nation” of its day, would never acknowledge that there was any connection between their stand against Yahweh and the weather, the lack of political leadership, or the economy. But the truth is there are no nations outside of the sovereignty of God; there are no secular portions in the life of any nation or in the lives of families.

The Prophetic Sign of Coming Shame (20:1-6) – Jumping ahead, we come to a particular time-stamp that gives us some context. Ashdod had attempted to trust in Egypt and rebelled against Assyria but fell in 711 BC. Egypt, it turned out, was no help. Isaiah is told by God to dress, or rather undress, as a fallen captive in naked shame because this is what would happen to Egypt and all of Cush. If Judah trusted in Egypt, she would be ashamed as well (vv5-6). And in fact Egypt and Cush fell to Assyria in 701 BC.

The Salvation of God’s Enemies and a True United Nations (19:16-25) – The first message to Judah is, once again, “to trust in other nations for deliverance while turning from the LORD will be disastrous” (which is, by the way, the policy of our nation and the United Nations). Nations, military power, economic strength, alternate religious paths, nothing can stop the hand of God. But God’s ultimate aim in disrupting Egypt is the redemption of Egypt. And here, the promises of Isaiah’s message are almost unbelievable (remember Isaiah 2:1-4, or 11:1-16?).

There are five “*in that day*” clauses here. The irony runs thick and the picture of the work of Jesus Christ is all through it. “*In that day*” a great fear and dread of Judah (and her God) would fall upon Egypt, like unarmed women come upon suddenly, cowering in fear before the inevitable (vv16-17). But this would be, like the woman Rahab’s fear, the means by which God would turn Egypt to faith. For “*in that day*” the cities of Egypt will speak “*the lip*” of the Hebrews, swearing allegiance to the LORD of armies (v18). Somehow, “*in that day*” there will be an appropriate altar to the LORD in Egypt (not in Jerusalem?), and they would have a sign as you entered into the country that this land was the LORD’s. They will “*know the LORD*” and they will obey Him (vv19-21) for He will have struck them and healed them (v22). But it goes far beyond that. Mortal enemies, Assyria and Egypt, will have a “*highway*” between them, a “*Way*” that brings them together to worship together the true God (v23). And God will look “*in that day*” calling Egypt “*My people*,” Assyria “*the work of My hands*,” and Israel “*My inheritance*” (v25), and blessing them all.

Who is This God Who Calls Egypt “My People?” – A quick study of early church history will reveal that in Africa Christianity gained a firm foothold in Egypt where Mark, according to tradition, did the work of an evangelist and established the church which today is known as the Coptic Church. Some of the earliest copies and vernacular translations of the New Testament come from Egypt. And while it was home to the birth of the Arian heresy in the fourth century, it also gave us Athanasius and his orthodox defense of the Trinity. But obviously, what began “*in that day*” has only just begun. Nevertheless, what do we learn about God?

His Judgments are Set-ups for Mercy – His severe judgments are real and we are to heed His warnings. But God is in the business of saving the world. Assyria and Egypt (and America, etc) are not exempted from His benevolence because of contemporary rebellion. “*He contemplates their return to Him with the utmost satisfaction and delight*” (C. Simeon). This should raise our expectations regarding the work of missions and the gospel going forth. Can the Middle East (Assyria) be saved? Will Sudan and Ethiopia (Cush) bow the knee to Jesus? And will Israel recognize Jesus for Who He is?

And What of You? – Consider 19:20. Would God have sent such a Savior if your condition had not required it? Are you in conflict with your sin and Satan and in need of a Deliverer? How wide is God’s mercy; how wild is God’s grace?

*There’s a wideness in God’s mercy; Like the wideness of the sea
There’s a kindness in His justice, Which is more than liberty*