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Andrew M. Davis

Sermon Notes

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Egypt's Judgment and Salvation

Isaiah 19-20

There was a time that Egypt was the most powerful nation on earth—now, she is a third-world country, ranked 102nd in the world in terms of per capita economic strength

There was a time when Egypt's pyramids represented the towering achievement of human technology... now they stand as ancient reminders of how far Egypt has fallen

There was a time when Egypt's armies were the most feared on earth, when she could project her power anywhere she chose in that region of the world; now Egypt isn't even ranked among the top fifteen most powerful militaries in the world

But Egypt shouldn't feel singled out in this matter... the same is true of Assyria, Babylon, Greece, Rome, Mongolia, Spain, France, England, and Germany... all of whom had the opportunity to dominate the world for a brief time

In the immense relay race of the Rise and Fall of the Nations, no one nation has it for long

But the ultimate message of Isaiah 19-20 is not the judgment of God on Egypt... rather, it is the glorious future that some Egyptians will have in sweet fellowship with some Assyrians and some Israelites in eternal fellowship in the Kingdom of Christ

Isaiah 19:25 The LORD Almighty will bless them, saying, "Blessed be Egypt my people, Assyria my handiwork, and Israel my inheritance."

Astonishing!! "Egypt MY PEOPLE"... Only the New Covenant of Christ can bring this miracle about...

Understanding the background:

Two major Gentile forces in Isaiah's time were vying for control of the region of ancient Palestine: Assyria to the North and Egypt to the south... the smaller kingdoms in between were pawns in their power struggle... kingdoms like Philistia, Edom, Moab, Ammon, Aram, Phoenicia, and of course Israel and Judah were constantly struggling with their role, threatened by the power of the Assyrians and the Egyptians...

Sometimes these little kingdoms would ally together against each other (like in Isaiah 7, where King Ahaz was threatened by the alliance of Israel and Aram); sometimes they

would ally themselves with one of the megapowers—like Ahaz did at that time with Assyria

Remember that we said that making such an alliance with the brutal empire of the Assyrians was suicide—both politically and spiritually. Politically, it was like a little mouse faced with two larger mice, calling for help from an ally cat. The ally cat, Assyria, DID come to “help”... but after devouring the two larger mice, it turned on the little mouse—Judah—that asked for help.

By this time, King Hezekiah is ruling and he is much more tempted to turn away from Assyria, to rebel against Assyria, and to make an alliance with Egypt against Assyria

In these two chapters, Isaiah has a message, an oracle... literally a “burden” to unload on Egypt... he is speaking directly to the Egyptians, about their coming judgment by God; he is predicting that they will be almost completely ruined; but he is also predicting that they were turn spiritually to the God of the Jews—the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—and find salvation there

It is one of the most astonishing prophecies of God’s saving power over the Gentiles—because it also predicts the future unity and harmony of all three nations—Egypt, Assyria, and Israel—united together in true spiritual worship

So this is a message to Egypt from God

But it is also a message to Judah, to the Jews, not to look to Egypt for hope and salvation; don’t make the same mistake Ahaz made only in the opposite direction; Ahaz looked north to Assyria for salvation; Hezekiah and his counselors are being tempted to look south to Egypt for salvation

In these amazing two chapters, Isaiah is showing that reliance on Egypt is foolishness for many reasons; it will bring anyone who does it to ultimate shame; it will be a shameful thing to rely on Egypt when Egypt is going to be judged by God

I. Egypt’s Future Judgment

God judges Egypt in the four realms which they thought made her great

- 1) her politics (vs. 2, 4)
- 2) her religion (vs. 3)
- 3) her economy (vs. 5-10)
- 4) her wisdom (vs. 11-15)

A. The Lord’s Wrath Against Egypt (vs. 1)

Isaiah 19:1 An oracle concerning Egypt: See, the LORD rides on a swift cloud and is coming to Egypt. The idols of Egypt tremble before him, and the hearts of the Egyptians melt within them.

A terrifying picture of the wrath of the God of Israel... a wrath they should still remember from their dreadful time of judgment in the time of the Exodus... when the God of the Jews came close to destroying Egypt entirely

Now He is coming on a swift cloud to bring judgment on Egypt

1. Civil Strife and Conflict (vs. 2)

Isaiah 19:2 "I will stir up Egyptian against Egyptian-- brother will fight against brother, neighbor against neighbor, city against city, kingdom against kingdom.

This is civil war... a great judgment on a people; Egypt was, like most great nations, a conglomeration of different peoples... here God is threatening to stir up strife within the nation

Egypt was made up of 42 city-states; during this phase of her history, the city-states began to act as independent entities, with no one strong enough to unite them

Again note the fact that the sovereign God has power over the hearts of human beings to stir up dissension or to quell it...**I will stir up...**

Isaiah 45:7 I form the light and create darkness, I bring prosperity and create disaster; I, the LORD, do all these things.

2. Idolatry Exposed (vs. 3)

Isaiah 19:3 The Egyptians will lose heart, and I will bring their plans to nothing; they will consult the idols and the spirits of the dead, the mediums and the spiritists.

Egypt has long been the center of mystery religions, of occultists, of mediums and spiritists who consult the dead... the pyramids are proof of this

Egyptian religion has a fascination with death... the pyramids are, of course, elaborate tombs, monuments for dead Pharaoh's... and the mummification is a preparation of Egyptian people for the afterlife...

When the disaster that Isaiah is threatening comes, the Egyptians will flock to the temples, to the priests who will whisper and mutter and seek news, seek insight from the dead... but there will be no answer

3. Oppression (vs. 4)

Isaiah 19:4 I will hand the Egyptians over to the power of a cruel master, and a fierce king will rule over them,"

4. God Judges Egypt's Economy: The Nile Dried Up (vs. 5-10)

- a. Egypt totally dependent on the Nile for life
- b. It is no overstatement to say that without the Nile, there would be no Egypt
- c. Where the Nile ends the Sahara desert begins

A NASA satellite photo of modern Egypt shows a thin, twisting ribbon of green—the Nile—leading up to a fan of green near Alexandria, where the Nile delta feeds into the Mediterranean Sea... upstream in Egypt, that thin ribbon of green is a slender lifeline surrounded by the relentless nothingness of the sandy desert... it is an umbilical of life, and vulnerable to the hand of God

- d. Extensive array of irrigation ditches, all of it fed from the waters of the Nile
- e. Thus Egypt both very strong and very vulnerable
- f. Remember that God's first plague on Egypt was a plague on the Nile
- g. Here, Isaiah predicts that God will completely dry up the Nile
- h. Note the specificity of it

Isaiah 19:5-6 The waters of the river will dry up, and the riverbed will be parched and dry. ⁶ The canals will stink; the streams of Egypt will dwindle and dry up.

- i. Note the death of all plant life

Isaiah 19:6-7 The reeds and rushes will wither, ⁷ also the plants along the Nile, at the mouth of the river. Every sown field along the Nile will become parched, will blow away and be no more.

Those plants mean life to Egypt... when they die, so will the people die

- j. Note the economic disaster!!

Isaiah 19:8-10 The fishermen will groan and lament, all who cast hooks into the Nile; those who throw nets on the water will pine away. ⁹ Those who work with combed flax will despair, the weavers of fine linen will lose hope. ¹⁰ The workers in cloth will be dejected, and all the wage earners will be sick at heart.

- k. The idea: why trust in a nation so fragile, so vulnerable, that God can make dry up and blow away so easily??

B. God Judges Egypt's Wisdom (vs. 11-15)

Isaiah 19:11-15 The officials of Zoan are nothing but fools; the wise counselors of Pharaoh give senseless advice. ... ¹⁴ The LORD has poured into them a spirit

of dizziness; they make Egypt stagger in all that she does, as a drunkard staggers around in his vomit. ¹⁵ There is nothing Egypt can do-- head or tail, palm branch or reed.

1. consistently throughout Isaiah, God reserves His bitterest attacks on human pride
2. among the aspects of human pride that most offend God is to be wise in your own eyes

Isaiah 5:21 Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes and clever in their own sight.

3. like any prosperous nation, Egypt's fertile farmland fed by the continual flow of the Nile allowed her leaders and nobles to develop intellectually and artistically
4. America is a nation glutted with experts... with knowledgeable talking heads whom the media turns to in every crisis

Washington Post's website edits and publishes columns submitted by 13 prominent think tanks on a rotating basis every other weekday... it's called THINK TANK TOWN

A think tank is a group of pundits, experts, hand picked and assembled to give their wisdom on key issues

God is going to make Egypt's experts look foolish when they are crushed by Assyria and eventually brought so low they never rise again

5. God's judgment on Egypt was to turn their wisdom into foolishness... these supposed **cornerstones** of Egypt
6. they cannot predict the future, or understand what God is doing

Isaiah 19:12 Where are your wise men now? Let them show you and make known what the LORD Almighty has planned against Egypt.

7. so in the New Testament, God turns man's wisdom into foolishness

1 Corinthians 1:20 Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?

8. Christ is God's wisdom... God's final word on what it means to be truly wise

1 Corinthians 1:23-25 we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, ²⁴ but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. ²⁵ For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength.

C. Egypt's Strength Stripped (vs. 16)

Isaiah 19:16 In that day the Egyptians will be like women. They will shudder with fear at the uplifted hand that the LORD Almighty raises against them.

1. no mighty superpower will Egypt be then...
2. her military strength will be as nothing
3. Egyptians mightiest soldiers will be as women, trembling

Thus we have seen the coming judgment on Egypt... judgment on Egypt politically, religiously, economically, militarily

A central question remains for the people of God, for Judah, the remnant to whom Isaiah is directing his ministry

“If Egypt is so weak and will soon come under judgment by Almighty God, then why run to Egypt for help when trouble comes?”

II. The Shame of Relying on Egypt

Judah was constantly tempted to run back to Egypt for help... to turn to Egypt when in trouble... and this is a great insult to Almighty God

Later in Isaiah, the prophet will speak of emissaries taking Jewish gold and offerings to Egypt in exchange for military assistance:

Isaiah 30:1-3 "Woe to the obstinate children," declares the LORD, "to those who carry out plans that are not mine, forming an alliance, but not by my Spirit, heaping sin upon sin; ² who go down to Egypt without consulting me; who look for help to Pharaoh's protection, to Egypt's shade for refuge. ³ But Pharaoh's protection will be to your shame, Egypt's shade will bring you disgrace.

Isaiah 30:6-7 the envoys carry their riches on donkeys' backs, their treasures on the humps of camels, to that unprofitable nation, ⁷ to Egypt, whose help is utterly useless. Therefore I call her Rahab the Do-Nothing.

Here in Isaiah 19-20, God is exposing the weakness of Egypt and her future shame

He does it in the most graphic terms in Isaiah 20... Isaiah the prophet acts out Egypt's future shame

There is no need to go into detail in Isaiah 20

The point of the chapter is clear... if Egypt is going to be humiliated in the future, how can she bring any help to Judah?

It is actually a SHAMEFUL THING to rely on anything but God

A. The Lesson: Shame on All Who Don't Rely on God

Isaiah 20:5-6 Those who trusted in Cush and boasted in Egypt will be afraid and put to shame. ⁶ In that day the people who live on this coast will say, 'See what has happened to those we relied on, those we fled to for help and deliverance from the king of Assyria! How then can we escape?''

Yet for all of this, the glowing center of the passage today is God's incredible saving concern for the Egyptians AND the Assyrians, not just the Jews

The message for these Gentile nations again and again:

There is only one God, and He actively reigns over the events of the earth; this one God will bring judgment on all nations on earth for their sins; BUT this one God has also savingly revealed Himself through the tiny nation of Israel

As Jesus said to the Samaritan woman at the well:

John 4:22 salvation is from the Jews.

III. The Glorious Future of Egypt—and the World (19:17-25)

God has always had His eye on the whole world... on all the nations of earth

Genesis 12:3 I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."

A. Transformed Hearts: The Fear of the Lord is the Beginning of Wisdom

Isaiah 19:17 And the land of Judah will bring terror to the Egyptians; everyone to whom Judah is mentioned will be terrified, because of what the LORD Almighty is planning against them.

1. perhaps it's because of the reputation the Lord has earned by His mighty deeds in the past
2. Rahab the prostitute heard of the mighty deeds of the Lord in Egypt and at the Red Sea:

Joshua 2:11 When we heard of it, our hearts melted and everyone's courage failed because of you, for the LORD your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below.

3. it seems some Gentiles know this basic part of the promise to Abraham

Genesis 12:3 I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse

4. Egypt was well-known for its supposed “wise men” and counselors; but now, this fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom that may well lead to the salvation of many Egyptians

Proverbs 9:10 "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.

B. Transformed Cities: Swearing Allegiance to the Lord Almighty

Isaiah 19:18 In that day five cities in Egypt will speak the language of Canaan and swear allegiance to the LORD Almighty. One of them will be called the City of Destruction.

1. under the extreme distresses mentioned in this chapter, they will turn to the Lord Almighty seeking deliverance
2. how often does God use terrible afflictions to jar people out of their complacency and prejudices and seek the Lord?!
3. the Egyptians looked down on the Semites as “sand-dwellers” and spoke of them with contempt; but now they are willing even to adopt the language of the Jews!!
4. “Five Cities” ... a mysterious promise... there were 42 city-states and as many as 30,000 cities total; so this may represent a small number of Egyptians whose clans and families turn at last to the Lord
5. “swear allegiance” = an oath of loyalty to the Lord; speaking words of faith, of commitment
6. “One of them will be called the ‘City of Destruction’

i) Remember that in Pilgrim’s Progress, that was the name of Christian’s hometown... the “City of Destruction” it was called

C. Transformed Religion: An Altar to the Lord in the Heart of Egypt

Isaiah 19:19 In that day there will be an altar to the LORD in the heart of Egypt, and a monument to the LORD at its border.

1. no longer will they worship the false gods and idols; here is evidence of a whole new way of worshipping the Lord
2. the altar points to the sacrifice of Christ... this is Old Covenant language of a focus on the true God, and on the sacrificial system He established... all of it was a picture of Christ crucified

D. God Sends a Savior

Isaiah 19:20-21 It will be a sign and witness to the LORD Almighty in the land of Egypt. When they cry out to the LORD because of their oppressors, he will send them a savior and defender, and he will rescue them. ²¹ So the LORD will make himself known to the Egyptians, and in that day they will acknowledge the LORD.

1. the afflictions of the Lord have all been for a purpose... to bring them to this point of calling on the name of the Lord

Isaiah 19:22 The LORD will strike Egypt with a plague; he will strike them and heal them. They will turn to the LORD, and he will respond to their pleas and heal them.

2. the Lord has orchestrated these miseries to break the Egyptians of their pride and to cause them to seek a Savior... the Lord brings the misery and then delivers them from it
3. the true oppressors are sin and death... no tyranny is greater than these
4. the elect Egyptians will cry out to the Lord for deliverance, and He will send the only Savior there can be—Jesus Christ
5. in this way alone will God make Himself known to the Egyptians—through the person and work of Christ and the proclamation of the gospel

E. Transformed Hearts: A New Life in Christ

Isaiah 19:21 So the LORD will make himself known to the Egyptians, and in that day they will acknowledge the LORD. They will worship with sacrifices and grain offerings; they will make vows to the LORD and keep them.

1. God will reveal Himself to the Egyptians... at last they will turn to the Lord with true hearts of worship
2. they will love Him, serve Him, trust in Him, take their vows in His name and keep them
3. this is the picture of the conversion of Egyptian people to the faith of the gospel

F. Transformed Alliances: Worshiping as One People on the Earth

Isaiah 19:23-24 In that day there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria. The Assyrians will go to Egypt and the Egyptians to Assyria. The Egyptians and Assyrians will worship together. ²⁴ In that day Israel will be the third, along with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing on the earth.

1. Old way: Egypt and Assyria were enemies, with Israel in between, seeking alliance with one or the other in military aggression against the third

2. New way: Christ Himself is our peace, who destroys the dividing wall of hostility between Jew and Gentile and between Gentile and Gentile
3. these verses speak of commerce, of trade, of people moving easily from one land to the next with no fear, no warfare, no hostility
4. and all these nations, Egypt, Assyria, and Israel will be blessings on the earth
5. for me, this prophecy can be fulfilled most clearly both in the millennial reign of Christ and in the eternal state of the New Heavens and New Earth

G. Transformed Status: Outsiders Who Become the People of God

Isaiah 19:25 The LORD Almighty will bless them, saying, "Blessed be Egypt my people, Assyria my handiwork, and Israel my inheritance."

1. BLESSED BE EGYPT MY PEOPLE

- a. Absolutely amazing words!!!!!!
- b. The Jews might have been jealous if they had understood what the Lord had planned
- c. That Gentiles could actually be the people of the living God... adopted into His family, no less beloved than the Jews themselves
- d. The very thing Paul speaks about in Romans 9

Romans 9:23-26 "I will call them 'my people' who are not my people; and I will call her 'my loved one' who is not my loved one,"²⁶ and, "It will happen that in the very place where it was said to them, 'You are not my people,' they will be called 'sons of the living God.'"

The elect Egyptians, who turn to God in faith will through Christ become sons of the living God...

Revelation 21:3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God."

2. Blessed be Assyria!! My handiwork

- a. and concerning the violent, vile, hateful Assyrians, even for them there is hope; even "the Nazis of the ancient world" can be transformed by the hands of the living God

blessed be Assyria, my handiwork

- b. yes, it is true that every Assyrian was God's handiwork in that He knit them all together in their mother's wombs
- c. but this verse goes beyond that, to speak of the new creation of God in their souls... God working something entirely new within them, by the marvelous work of regeneration

Ephesians 2:10 For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus

2 Corinthians 5:17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!

- 3. Blessed be Israel!! My inheritance
 - a. The elect Jews will in no way be omitted
 - b. God will save them as well, and they will be God's own inheritance
 - c. Just as God is their reward, so they will be God's reward

Summary:

The Jews were constantly tempted to turn to Egypt for military assistance from the Assyrian threat;

They should be ashamed of that! God Himself alone should be their only hope

For God actually plans to bring about massive destruction on Egypt, so their help will only bring shame

BUT that's not the extent of His plan! God will actually move out in sovereign power and save the elect among the Egyptians; He will convert them by His power and His gospel

They will look to Christ their savior, trusting in His blood shed on the cross, and will be called the people of the living God; and Egypt, Assyria, and Israel will be perfectly united in Christ for all eternity

Ephesians 2:14 For [Christ] himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility

Revelation 7:9-10 After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. ¹⁰ And they cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb."

IV. Application

- A. Consistent Warning: Trust Nothing but Christ

1. Israel's sin was to trust in Gentile nations who themselves were under the wrath of God
2. this is a warning to us spiritually to put our trust in nothing but Christ
3. our confidence should come from Christ's finished work on the cross, not from our alliances, or military strength, or achievements, or good works, or religiosity, or anything done by man's strength

B. Think Like a Christian About National Enemies

1. the USA has national enemies... but we need to understand the message of Isaiah 19
2. the gospel has the power to turn enemies into friends
3. remember how God speaks a blessing even on Egypt and Assyria here:
Blessed be Egypt my people, Assyria my handiwork, and Israel my inheritance
4. we need to realize that God has His elect in Iran, and North Korea, and Saudi Arabia, and India, and every nation on earth
5. we need to pray for the spread of the gospel in those hard places

C. Learn to See God's Hand in Everything

1. God is the one who brings affliction and then heals

Isaiah 19:22 The LORD will strike Egypt with a plague; he will strike them and heal them. They will turn to the LORD, and he will respond to their pleas and heal them.

2. God is the one who brings disaster, then prosperity

Isaiah 45:7 I form the light and create darkness, I bring prosperity and create disaster; I, the LORD, do all these things.

3. He does these things for His purpose
4. learn to turn to Him in trouble, affliction, sickness and trial and ask Him for the healing