

• *Yahweh is pictured as a mighty warrior ready to destroy the Egyptian gods*

Isaiah is surveying the surrounding nations. Babylon will be overthrown like Sodom and Gomorrah¹. The Philistines will melt away². Moab's survivors will be few and feeble³. Damascus will become a heap of ruins⁴. Now the prophet comes to a fifth oracle, one that concerns Egypt⁵. Yahweh, the God of Israel, is pictured as a mighty warrior riding on the clouds to Egypt, to destroy the Egyptian gods. Both the idols and the Egyptians are full of fear.

13:19
14:31
16:14
17:1
19:1-20:6

¹*An oracle concerning Egypt.
See, Yahweh rides on a swift cloud
and is coming to Egypt.
The nonentities of Egypt stagger before him,
and the hearts of the Egyptians melt within them.*

God's judgement brings about the collapse of society

God's judgement brings about the collapse of society. There will be animosity within the land as God hands the Egyptians over to their own malice towards each other.

²*Surely I will stir up Egyptian against Egyptian,
brother will fight against brother,
neighbour against neighbour,
city against city,
kingdom against kingdom.*

• *Egyptians will fight each other*

The nation's ambitions will fail.

• *Nation's ambitions will fail*

³*The spirit of the Egyptians will be demoralized,
and I will bring their plans to nothing.*

They will be so desperate for guidance that they will turn to spiritism for help.

• *They will turn to spiritism*

They will consult the nonentities and the ghosts of the dead, the mediums and the spiritists.

• *A despotic dictator*

They will experience the tyranny of a despotic dictator. Various Assyrian rulers conquered Egypt in the seventh century BC.

• *The Nile will dry up*

⁴*I will hand Egypt over
to the power of a cruel taskmaster,
and a fierce king will rule over them —
it is an oracle of the Sovereign, Yahweh Almighty.*

The Nile itself, which was the source of Egypt's prosperity, will be devastated.

• *The Nile's plants will be ruined*

⁵*The waters from the sea will dry up, and
the river itself will be parched and dry.
⁶The canals will stink;
the streams of Egypt will dwindle and dry up.*

The valuable plants which grow in the Nile will be ruined.

*The reeds and rushes will wither,
⁷also the plants along the Nile, at
the mouth of the river.*

• *Lands will become parched*

The well-watered lands beside the river will become parched with drought.

*Every sown field along the Nile
will become parched, will be blown away and be no more.*

• *Fishermen will be reduced to poverty*

The fishermen who catch fish from the Nile will be reduced to poverty.

⁸The fishermen will groan and lament, all who cast hooks into the Nile; those who throw nets on the water will pine away.

• *Economic devastation*

But it is not only fishermen who lose their livelihood. Every section of the nation will be economically devastated. Those who make clothing material by weaving flax will be equally ruined.

⁹Those who work with combed flax will despair, the weavers of fine linen will lose hope.

• *Ruin for leaders*

Even the leaders of society will face ruin.

¹⁰The pillars of society will be dejected, and all the wage earners will be sick at heart.

• *Officials lose wisdom*

Just as the economy collapses, so also the officials of government lose their wisdom.

¹¹What fools are the officials of Zoan! The wisest counsellors of Pharaoh give senseless advice. How can you say to Pharaoh, 'I am one of the wise men, a disciple of the ancient kings?'

¹²Where are your wise men now? Let them tell you! Let them know what Yahweh Almighty

has advised against Egypt. ¹³The officials of Zoan have become fools, the leaders of Noph are deceived; the cornerstones of her peoples have led Egypt astray.

• *God is at work*

But it is not all a tragic accident or a matter of bad luck. God is at work.

¹⁴Yahweh has poured into them a spirit of bewilderment; they make Egypt stagger in all that she does, as a drunkard staggers around in his vomit.

God is the only hope for Egypt

God is the only hope for Egypt. Isaiah's message of judgement points to the only One who can give any hope for a nation under judgement – and that is God himself. If the Egyptians are handed over to animosity towards one another, if they are demoralized and turn in desperation to the occult, what hope is there for them? Verse 15 brings a sub-section of Isaiah to an end with grim pessimism.

• *Egypt represents any nation or human resource in which we wish to find security without God's help*

¹⁵There is nothing Egypt can do – head or tail, palm branch or reed.

The precise time when Isaiah first preached this message is uncertain. It could have been at any time at the end of the eighth century BC. But the date does not matter. Isaiah uses Egypt as a sample of any nation and any human resource in which we wish to find security without God's help and guidance. It will turn out to be useless. But the story does not end there. For the God who judges sin is also the God who provides healing and restoration. Isaiah 19:16–25 describes a way of recovery and salvation for Egypt

The recovery of Egypt begins with repentance

The recovery of Egypt begins with repentance. The terrible afflictions that come upon Egypt, described in 19:1-15, will bring them to a change of mind. Isaiah says:

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



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

• *Afflictions will bring a change of mind*

• *Blessing for Egypt will begin when they fear God*

Egypt's regard for Judah probably came in 701 BC (the time of the Assyrian invasion of Israel when God suddenly intervened on behalf of Judah). But Isaiah sees it as a shadow of the undated future turning of Egypt to faith in Yahweh and commitment to God's people. Blessing for Egypt will begin when they fear God's people and fear God himself. To use New Testament language, faith begins with repentance, *metanoia* (as the Greek has it), a change of mind that leads to a turning to God.



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