



Part 29 A New Day for an Old Enemy (19:18-20:6)

• The recovery of Egypt begins with repentance

Suffering may be used by God to bring about repentance. At some stage during the late eighth century BC Egypt was brought to dismal failure (as 19:1–15 describes it). But Isaiah sees that such a state might lead to repentance and blessing. Isaiah says: ‘In that day – in the undated future – such humiliation might lead to Egypt’s salvation.’ The recovery of Egypt begins with repentance¹⁸.

18 19:15-17

The next stage will be the adoption of new attitudes

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18¹In that day five cities in Egypt will adopt the language of Canaan and swear allegiance to Yahweh Almighty. One of them will be called the City of Destruction.

• Adopting language – speech purged

The details here are obscure, but it seems that, after coming to fear God and his people¹⁸, the next step is to start talking differently, to change one’s allegiance and to adopt some new attitudes. Adopting the language of Canaan is probably a way of referring to a changed attitude towards God with sins of speech purged (we remember Isaiah 6 and Isaiah’s experience). Then a substantial part of the nation (five cities!) declares its allegiance to God. As a result it regards its greatest city as a city destined for destruction. The combination of new talk, new allegiance, newly adopted fear concerning what was once its pride and glory (a city now viewed as doomed) all refer to a deep repentance over past attitudes.

18 19:15-17

Repentance will lead to faith and a new way of living

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19¹In that day there will be an altar to Yahweh in the heart of Egypt and a monument to Yahweh at its border.

Newness of life begins with an altar.

20¹It will be a sign and witness to Yahweh Almighty in the land of Egypt.

• Altar – sacrifice for sin

The altar was the place where there was offered a sacrifice for sin. It prefigured faith in the sacrifice of Jesus upon the cross. From the middle (the heart) to the border there would be national repentance in Egypt.

• Prayer

The next aspect of the matter is prayer.

When they cry out to Yahweh because of their oppressors, he will send them a saviour and defender, and he will rescue them.

• Discover God in a new way

They will discover God in a new way.

21¹So Yahweh will make himself known to the Egyptians, and in that day they will know Yahweh.

• Express commitment

They will openly express their commitment to the Lord.

They will serve him with sacrifices and grain-offerings; they will make vows to Yahweh and keep them.

• Learn from God’s chastenings

They will learn from God’s chastenings.

22Yahweh will strike Egypt with a plague; he will strike them and heal them. They will turn to Yahweh, and he will respond to their pleas and heal them.

Enemies will come together to be one in worship

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23In 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 the Assyrians will worship together.

• Spreading revival – nations come together

This is a picture of spreading revival. First there was the beginning of revival – a few cities²¹ – then a whole country²², then an international movement of fellowship between one-time enemies²³. A world is gathered into unity in the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ. Nations that have before been fearful of each other come together in their knowledge of God.

21 19:18
22 19:19-22
23 19:23

24In that day Israel will be the third, along with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing on the earth. 25Yahweh Almighty will bless them, saying, 'Blessed be Egypt my people, Assyria my handiwork, and Israel my inheritance.'

• Isaiah told to remove his clothes

Isaiah 20:1–6 belongs with Isaiah 19:1–24 because it gives a sample of how chapter 19 might be fulfilled. Isaiah was told to wear the minimum of clothes, perhaps nothing but a loincloth.

1In the year that the supreme commander, sent by Sargon king of Assyria, came to Ashdod and attacked and captured it, 2during that time, Yahweh spoke through Isaiah son of Amoz. He said to him, 'Take off the sackcloth from your body and the sandals from your feet.' And he did so, going around stripped and barefoot.

• Symbol of Egypt's humiliation

Then God gave a word of explanation. Isaiah's behaviour was a piece of symbolism. His piece of symbolic drama meant that Egypt would be humiliated by Assyria.

3And Yahweh said, 'Just as my servant Isaiah has gone stripped and barefoot for three years, as a sign and portent against Egypt and Cush, 4so the king of Assyria will lead away stripped and barefoot the Egyptian captives and Cushite exiles, young and old, with buttocks bared – it is the nakedness of Egypt!'

• Ashdod and Egypt would suffer

At the time when Ashdod (a Philistine town) was rebelling, not only would Ashdod suffer for their rebellion, but mighty Egypt would suffer also. They were at this time allied with Ethiopia, so Egypt and Cush would suffer together.

• A lesson for Israel – Egyptians cannot protect Israel if they cannot protect themselves

There was a lesson to be learned by Israel as they watched what happened to Egypt. Why should Israel hope to be protected by the Egyptians from Assyrian invasion if the Egyptians could not even protect themselves?

5They will be shattered and brought to shame, because of Cush in whom they were so confident, and because of Egypt in whom they boasted. 6In that day the people who live on this coastline will say, 'See! This is what has happened to those we relied on, to whom we have fled for help, hoping to be delivered from the king of Assyria! How then shall we ourselves escape?'

• Egypt's humiliation brings revival and friendship with Israel – fulfilled by the cross

Isaiah 19:16–24 said worldwide blessing might come when Egypt is humiliated. Isaiah 20:1–6 gives a foretaste of how it might happen. Social and national humiliation may become the beginning of a new turning to God. Israel's oldest enemy will – in a day of global revival – become Israel's friend. It is a hope that

will be fulfilled not by political cleverness but by faith in ‘the altar’ – the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.

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