

Isaiah Chapter 19

Verses 1-10: The burden of Egypt is a message of both judgment and hope for Egypt. Isaiah then pictures the coming Egyptian civil war of the seventh century B.C. The Egyptians fell to Esarhaddon of Assyria (in 671 B.C.). Idols, charmers, familiar spirits, wizards refer to various aspects of Egyptian religion, which was dominated by the occult. The cruel lord and fierce king are references to the Assyrian overlords who were to dominate Egypt for nearly 20 years.

(In verses 1-4), disunity and internal strife because of idolatry are to spell the end of Egypt's greatness.

Isaiah 19:1: "The burden of Egypt. Behold, the LORD rideth upon a swift cloud, and shall come into Egypt: and the idols of Egypt shall be moved at his presence, and the heart of Egypt shall melt in the midst of it."

"Burden" is a prophecy against Egypt. There is a physical Egypt and there is a symbolic Egypt (the world). In this sense, I believe this is speaking of the world. The world away from God would be a more specific designation.

"The LORD riding upon a swift cloud" means the LORD will come quickly. Clouds are vehicles for the Lord's coming to execute judgment elsewhere.

God will destroy the idols just as He did with the 10 plagues He brought on Egypt and the Pharaoh in Genesis. We know that God can melt our hearts when He gets ready.

Isaiah 19:2 "And I will set the Egyptians against the Egyptians: and they shall fight every one against his brother, and every one against his neighbor; city against city, [and] kingdom against kingdom."

In the physical, this could be speaking of the different rulers within the country fighting among their selves. This is speaking of upheaval within the country. In the spiritual sense, the world (Egypt), is always trying to do others in for their own self gain.

They do not care whether it is a brother, or not. They are thinking of their own flesh and do not care what happens to others.

Noted for its internal strife through the centuries, the nation will experience even worse under God's judgment.

Isaiah 19:3 "And the spirit of Egypt shall fail in the midst thereof; and I will destroy the counsel thereof: and they shall seek to the idols, and to the charmers, and to them that have familiar spirits, and to the wizards."

“Familiar spirits ... wizards”: Internal strife will lead to disorientation and depression. With nowhere else to turn, the Egyptians will consult spiritualists. Israelites of Isaiah’s day did the same (8:19).

"The spirit of Egypt" is the spirit of evil in the world. It is worldliness. They were a sinful people seeking power and fame. If we were to go through all the lists of sins that physical Egypt committed, we would find the same sins those worldly people (out of fellowship with God), are committing today.

Instead of going to the true source of help in their lives (God), they go to fortune-tellers, wizards, and all sorts of evil people for help. They are caught up in worldliness. They take no thought of God. Their failure will come because of their unfaithfulness to God.

They are evil and directly opposed to God.

Isaiah 19:4 "And the Egyptians will I give over into the hand of a cruel lord; and a fierce king shall rule over them, saith the Lord, the LORD of hosts."

Egypt was subject to foreign rule beginning with the Assyrian conquest of the middle seventh century B.C.

At the time of Moses, there were hundreds of false gods in Egypt. The ten plagues were directed at the false gods of Egypt. It seems even the plagues did not stop Egypt from worshiping false gods. God is not slack, but longsuffering. He gave them ample time to seek forgiveness and turn to God.

(Verse 4), is speaking of the day of punishment which comes on these idol worshippers. It is the very same thing, even if they are not living in Egypt. God will not always look the other way. His punishment may be long in coming, but it is sure they will be punished.

In physical Egypt, they were given over to cruel kings. In spiritual Egypt, they are given over to the devil himself.

Verses 5-10: we see that God will act to take away the country’s only fresh water resource, the Nile and its tributaries.

Isaiah 19:5 "And the waters shall fail from the sea, and the river shall be wasted and dried up."

In Egypt, it is a serious happening when the Nile dries up. Their livelihood and their own well-being is influenced by how much water comes from the Nile. Perhaps, that is why they worshipped the Nile.

Whether you are part of physical Egypt or spiritual Egypt, it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the Lord. God has cut off their water supply. This could bring about famine in the land.

Isaiah 19:6 "And they shall turn the rivers far away; [and] the brooks of defense shall be emptied and dried up: the reeds and flags shall wither."

If there is no water, the plants dry up and die. The "brooks of defense" had been water which surrounded an area making a natural defense. There was usually just one bridge over the water to give access to the outside world. The fortress would be easier to protect from the enemy with the water completely around it.

Isaiah 19:7 "The paper reeds by the brooks, by the mouth of the brooks, and every thing sown by the brooks, shall wither, be driven away, and be no [more]."

The alluvial deposits left by the flooding of the Nile yielded rich agricultural crops, permitting Egypt to export grain to the rest of the world.

The crops had been planted next to the Nile for irrigation. Some of it had actually been like a rice field which is under water part of its growth period. This just speaks of total crop failure. This type of crop failure is brought on by God.

Isaiah 19:8 "The fishers also shall mourn, and all they that cast angle into the brooks shall lament, and they that spread nets upon the waters shall languish."

There are no fish where the water dries up. The fish will all die. It really would not matter whether you were an individual fishing, or whether you were a commercial fisherman, the results are the same.

The loss of the Nile's important fishing business would mean a great loss to Egypt's population.

Isaiah 19:9 "Moreover they that work in fine flax, and they that weave networks, shall be confounded."

This "fine flax" is speaking of linen. There would be nothing to make the linen from. They would have no linen for sale to their usual buyers.

Egypt was famous for its production of linen from flax. Both the growth of the plant and the manufacture of the cloth depended on water.

Isaiah 19:10 "And they shall be broken in the purposes thereof, all that make sluices [and] ponds for fish."

The "they" refer to its foundations or pillars.

God was to remove the foundations or “pillars”, on which the working class depended. The word refers either generally to the economic structure of the society or specifically to the upper class which organized the businesses of the land.

Some will try to build their own ponds and wet areas to keep their crops from dying, but God will see to it that it does not help. It appears also, that these ponds were made for fish, as well. Fish are not good from stagnant water.

Verses 11-17: Isaiah predicts the failure of Egyptian wisdom, and the pride of Egyptian culture. Princes of Zoan refer to the capital of Tanis. Noph is Memphis, located at the apex of the Delta. Egypt will fall into utter confusion because the Lord has mingled a perverse spirit among the Egyptians to cause them to err in their discernment. Judah shall be a terror unto Egypt because Egypt is so weakened that even little Judah frightens her.

Verses 11-15: God’s judgment was to confound Egypt’s famed wisdom (1 Kings 4:30).

Isaiah 19:11 "Surely the princes of Zoan [are] fools, the counsel of the wise counsellors of Pharaoh is become brutish: how say ye unto Pharaoh, I [am] the son of the wise, the son of ancient kings?"

“Zoan” This major city of northern Egypt east of the Nile Delta region was the first large city a Semite would encounter in traveling toward the Nile. “Tanis” was also a name of this city that was a capital of northern Egypt at one point when the country split into two parts.

The 30th chapter of Ezekiel speaks of the destruction of Zoan by fire. It seems princes ruled in this area. God calls them fools. They were worshipping false gods.

The fact that they were descended from some one, did not give them the wisdom they needed. The advice they received was bad. True wisdom comes from the One True God.

(In this verse and verse 12), we see that whatever wisdom Egypt’s experts may have possessed formerly, they were helpless to deal with the crisis because they were ignorant of the Lord’s judgment against the land.

Isaiah 19:12 Where [are] they? where [are] thy wise [men]? And let them tell thee now, and let them know what the LORD of hosts hath purposed upon Egypt.

God is saying through Isaiah here, if they are so wise, let them advise you now. The wise men of all the ages put together are no comparison to the wisdom of God. God says, Tell them what the LORD is about to do and let them advise you how to avoid it.

The wisdom of this world is but foolishness to the LORD of all the earth.

Isaiah Chapter 19 Questions

1. What does "burden" in verse 1 mean?
2. What does Egypt symbolize?
3. What does the statement "the LORD rideth upon a swift cloud" mean?
4. Who will be against the Egyptians?
5. What is verse 2 speaking of?
6. What is the "spirit of Egypt"?
7. When in trouble, the Egyptians turn to _____ and _____.
8. What is the warning the author gave after verse 3?
9. How many plagues did God send against the people worshipping false gods in Egypt?
10. What day is verse 4 speaking of?
11. Spiritual Egypt, if they do not seek God, are given over to whom?
12. The livelihood of the Egyptians was controlled by what?
13. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the _____.
14. Who cut their water supply off?
15. What happens to the plants when the water dries up?
16. What was the "brook of defense"?
17. Where had the crops been planted so they would have water?
18. What is verse 8 speaking of?
19. What is "fine flax" speaking of?
20. What does "confounded" in verse 9 mean?
21. Where was Zoan?
22. What does Ezekiel have to say about Zoan?
23. What does God call the princes of Egypt?
24. Why did He call them that?

25. God challenges whom in verse 12?