
Observations from Isaiah

LESSON XV : CUSH AND EGYPT (18:1-20:6)

General outline (from Young's *Isaiah*):

- I. The Crisis and the Messiah (1:1-12:6)
 - A. Introduction to the Entire Prophecy (1:1-31)
 - B. Early Messages of Isaiah (2:1-5:30)
 - C. Judah's True Hope: The Messianic King (6:1-12:6)
- II. The Theocracy and the Nations (13:1-39:8)
 - A. Judah and the World Power (13:1-27:13)
 - 1. The Growth of the Mesopotamia Power (13:1-14:32)
 - 2. The Downfall of Moab, Syria, and Other Nations (15:1-18:7)
 - a. The Oracle of Moab (15:1-9)
 - b. Moab's Suffering (16:1-14)
 - c. Judgement Over Syria (17:1-14)
 - d. Distant Effect of Judgement (18:1-7)
 - 3. Egypt in Confusion (19:1-25)
 - 4. Egypt and Ethiopia: A False Hope (20:1-6)

d. Distant Effect of Judgement (18:1-7)

Woe to the land of whirling wings along the rivers of Cush, which sends envoys by sea in papyrus boats over the water. Go, swift messengers, to a people tall and smooth-skinned, to a people feared far and wide, an aggressive nation of strange speech, whose land is divided by rivers. All you people of the world, you who live on the earth, when a banner is raised on the mountains, you will see it, and when a trumpet sounds, you will hear it. This is what the LORD says to me: "I will remain quiet and will look on

Woe to the land shadowing with wings, which is beyond the rivers of Ethiopia: That sendeth ambassadors by the sea, even in vessels of bulrushes upon the waters, saying, Go, ye swift messengers, to a nation scattered and peeled, to a people terrible from their beginning hitherto; a nation meted out and trodden down, whose land the rivers have spoiled! All ye inhabitants of the world, and dwellers on the earth, see ye, when he lifteth up an ensign on the mountains; and when he bloweth a trumpet, hear ye. For so the LORD said unto me, I will take my rest, and I will

Ho, land shadowed [with] wings, That [is] beyond the rivers of Cush, That is sending by sea ambassadors, Even with implements of reed on the face of the waters, — Go, ye light messengers, Unto a nation drawn out and peeled, Unto a people fearful from its beginning and onwards, A nation meeting out by line, and treading down, Whose land floods have spoiled. All ye inhabitants of the world, And ye dwellers of earth, At the lifting up of an ensign on hills ye look, And at the blowing of a trumpet ye hear. For thus said Jehovah unto me, 'I rest,

from my dwelling place, like shimmering heat in the sunshine, like a cloud of dew in the heat of harvest.” For, before the harvest, when the blossom is gone and the flower becomes a ripening grape, he will cut off the shoots with pruning knives, and cut down and take away the spreading branches. They will all be left to the mountain birds of prey and to the wild animals; the birds will feed on them all summer, the wild animals all winter. At that time gifts will be brought to the LORD Almighty from a people tall and smooth-skinned, from a people feared far and wide, an aggressive nation of strange speech, whose land is divided by rivers — the gifts will be brought to Mount Zion, the place of the Name of the LORD Almighty. (NIV)

consider in my dwelling place like a clear heat upon herbs, and like a cloud of dew in the heat of harvest. For afore the harvest, when the bud is perfect, and the sour grape is ripening in the flower, he shall both cut off the sprigs with pruning hooks, and take away and cut down the branches. They shall be left together unto the fowls of the mountains, and to the beasts of the earth: and the fowls shall summer upon them, and all the beasts of the earth shall winter upon them. In that time shall the present be brought unto the LORD of hosts of a people scattered and peeled, and from a people terrible from their beginning hitherto; a nation meted out and trodden under foot, whose land the rivers have spoiled, to the place of the name of the LORD of hosts, the mount Zion. (KJV)

and I look on My settled place, As a clear heat on an herb. As a thick cloud of dew in the heat of harvest. For before harvest, when the flower is perfect, And the blossom is producing unripe fruit, Then hath [one] cut the sprigs with pruning hooks, And the branches he hath turned aside, cut down. They are left together to the ravenous fowl of the mountains, And to the beast of the earth, And summered on them hath the ravenous fowl, And every beast of the earth wintereth on them. At that time brought is a present to Jehovah of Hosts, A nation drawn out and peeled. Even of a people fearful from the beginning hitherto, A nation meting out by line, and treading down, Whose land floods have spoiled, Unto the place of the name of Jehovah of Hosts — mount Zion!’ (YLT)

A DIFFICULT CHAPTER — Some consider chapter 18 as a continuance of the former portion, one reason being is that it doesn’t begin with the “*burden, oracle*” that Isaiah’s been using throughout this section of scripture. “The eighteenth chapter of Isaiah ... is one of the most obscure passages of the ancient prophets.... The object of it, the end and design of it; the people to whom it is addressed; the history to which it belongs; the person who sends the messengers; and the nation to whom they are sent, are all obscure and doubtful. Much of the obscurity lies in the highly figurative cast of the language, and in the ambiguity of some of the principal words, arising from the great variety of the senses often comprehended under the primary meaning of a single root.” [Barnes, *Notes on OT*] Others consider the chapters connected: “The three prophecies in ch. 18, 19 and 20 really form a trilogy. The first (ch. 18), which, like ch. 1, the introduction to the whole, is without any special heading, treats in language of the sublimest pathos of Ethiopia. The second (ch. 19) treats in a calmer and more descriptive tone of Egypt. The third (ch. 20) treats of both Egypt and Ethiopia in the style of historic prose. The kingdom to which all three prophecies refer is one and the same, viz., the Egypto-Ethiopian kingdom; but whilst ch. 18 refers to the ruling nation, ch. 19 treats of the conquered one, and ch. 20 embraces both together.” [K&D, *Isaiah*]

“AVOID ENTANGLING ALLIANCES” — “In 715 BC the Ethiopian Piankhi mastered Egypt and founded the twenty-fifth (Ethiopian) Dynasty. He immediately sought to be a world statesman

and began sending envoys to create an anti-Assyrian conglomerate.” [Motyer, *Isaiah*] This chapter gives the Lord’s continued charge against such an alliance, similar to what we’ve seen with Isaiah exhorting Judah to not join an Ephraim / Syria (Aram) alliance against Assyria but rather trust in the Lord. What follows in chapter 18 is Isaiah’s message to those envoys sent to Judah, with a reply from the Lord.

CUSH — “Biblical Cush is usually translated ‘Ethiopia’ but the NIV has wisely chosen transliteration rather than translation; for the term designates a much larger area than present-day Ethiopia — an area including the Sudan and Somalia.” [Grogan, *Isaiah*] *Land of whirring wings* evokes several interpretations, three of which are most commonly held. The first is that the Heb word’s possible root could be translated *shadow*, the reference therefore being the lands more near the equator where people have double shadows. However a land of that distance away from Israel seems unlikely to be the reference. The second is that this is a reference to insects, Cush being notable for such insects. The third is that this *whirring wings* is a reference to Ethiopian ships whizzing up and down the rivers liked winged insets. The references to sails as wings are almost universal among early sailors. Whatever the exact reference, the sense is undoubtedly to the nation of Ethiopia.

ETHIOPIAN FOREIGN AMBASSADORS — “Ambassadors in OT days were not permanent officials placed by nations in the capital cities of other states with whom they were on friendly terms; rather, they were emissaries sent out on special commissions. There can be no doubt that the purpose here was to foment rebellion against Assyria, which was very much in the interests of the rival power that straddled the Nile valley.” [Grogan, *Isaiah*] *Tall and smooth* (v2) are usually interpreted as referring to the Ethiopians, a “proverbially tall people in the ancient world.” But Motyer gives an alternate rendering: the Heb word for “tall” is literally *to draw out, to prolong* and never translated as tall. It could have the sense of *long-standing*, i.e. *having a long historical record*. Smooth means polished, possibly as a sword sharpened and gleaming. Therefore *tall and smooth* could have the sense of *a long-established people, well-armed, ready for battle*, exactly the type some would search out for a military alliance.

ISAIAH’S MESSAGE TO THE WORLD — A message to all the world — Isaiah cries out to the world, for all to see (a banner lifted on a hill) and hear (the sound of a trumpet). **The Lord waits** — The Lord sits patiently by as history unfolds, but the reader is not to imagine this implies a passive situation. “As heat and dew are not just incidental to harvest but contributory factors, so the Lord moves the whole process of history towards its maturing.” [Motyer, *Isaiah*] **The Lord chooses His moment** — The time is the harvest prior to reaping the grain. At just the right moment the Lord moves, destroying the warring forces. *“The idea is that of stillness and rest where there is no storm or tempest to dissipate the gently-falling dew. This is an emblem of the perfect quietness with which God would regard the preparations for war until the proper time would come for him to interpose. The whole passage is similar to Ps 2:4,5: ‘He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh; Jehovah shall have them in derision. Then shall he speak unto them in his wrath, And vex them in his hot displeasure.’ The idea is, that he would be as calm as the sun is upon the herb, or the dew upon the harvest field, until the time should come when it would be proper for him to interpose, and disconcert their counsels. When and how this would be done is stated in the following verses; and the whole passage is most striking illustration of the manner with which God contemplates the machinations and evil designs of the wicked.”* [Barnes, *Notes on OT*] **The results: pilgrimage to Israel** — Those same emissaries who came with talk of war will then come with gifts of peace to Mount Zion.

3. Egypt in Confusion (19:1-15)

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. "I will stir up Egyptian against Egyptian — brother will fight against brother, neighbor against neighbor, city against city, kingdom against kingdom. 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. I will hand the Egyptians over to the power of a cruel master, and a fierce king will rule over them," declares the Lord, the LORD Almighty. The waters of the river will dry up, and the riverbed will be parched and dry. The canals will stink; the streams of Egypt will dwindle and dry up. The reeds and rushes will wither, 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. The fishermen will groan and lament, all who cast hooks into the Nile; those who throw nets on the water will pine away. Those who work with combed flax will despair, the weavers of fine linen will lose hope. The workers in cloth will be dejected, and

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. 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. 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. 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. And the waters shall fail from the sea, and the river shall be wasted and dried up. And they shall turn the rivers far away; and the brooks of defence shall be emptied and dried up: the reeds and flags shall wither. 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 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. Moreover they that work in fine flax, and they that weave networks, shall be confounded. And they shall be broken in the purposes thereof,

The burden of Egypt. Lo, Jehovah is riding on a swift thick cloud, And He hath entered Egypt, And moved have been the idols of Egypt at His presence, And the heart of Egypt melteth in its midst. And I armed Egyptians against Egyptians, And they fought, each against his brother, And each against his neighbour, City against city, kingdom against kingdom. And emptied out hath been in its midst the spirit of Egypt. And its counsel I swallow up, And they have sought unto the idols, And unto the charmers, And unto those having familiar spirits, And unto the wizards. And I have delivered the Egyptians Into the hand of a hard lord, And a strong king doth rule over them, An affirmation of the Lord, Jehovah of Hosts. And failed have waters from the sea, And a river is wasted and dried up. And they have turned away the flowings, Weak and dried up have been brooks of the bulwark, Reed and flag have withered. Exposed things by the brook, by the edge of the brook, And every sown thing of the brook, hath withered, It hath been driven away, and is not. And lamented have the fishers, And mourned have all casting angle into a brook, And those spreading nets on the face of the waters have languished. And ashamed have been makers of fine flax, And weavers of networks. And its foundations have been smitten, All making wages

all the wage earners will be sick at heart. The officials of Zoan are nothing but fools; the wise counselors of Pharaoh give senseless advice. How can you say to Pharaoh, "I am one of the wise men, a disciple of the ancient kings"? Where are your wise men now? Let them show you and make known what the LORD Almighty has planned against Egypt. The officials of Zoan have become fools, the leaders of Memphis are deceived; the cornerstones of her peoples have led Egypt astray. 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. There is nothing Egypt can do — head or tail, palm branch or reed. (NIV)

all that make sluices and ponds for fish. 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? 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. The princes of Zoan are become fools, the princes of Noph are deceived; they have also seduced Egypt, even they that are the stay of the tribes thereof. The LORD hath mingled a perverse spirit in the midst thereof: and they have caused Egypt to err in every work thereof, as a drunken man staggereth in his vomit. Neither shall there be any work for Egypt, which the head or tail, branch or rush, may do. (KJV)

[are] afflicted in soul. Only, fools [are] the princes of Zoan, The counsel of the wise ones of the counsellors of Pharaoh hath become brutish. How say ye unto Pharaoh, 'A son of the wise am I, a son of kings of antiquity?' Where [are] they now, thy wise ones? Yea, let them tell to thee, I pray thee, And they know what Jehovah of Hosts hath counselled against Egypt! Foolish have been princes of Zoan, Lifted up have been princes of Noph, And they have caused Egypt to err, The chief of her tribes. Jehovah hath mingled in her midst A spirit of perverseness, And they have caused Egypt to err in all its work, As a drunkard erreth in his vomit. And there is no work to Egypt, That head or tail, branch or reed, may do. (YLT)

EGYPT — “When the northern treaty powers, Aram and Ephraim, were swallowed up by Assyria, the political centre of gravity moved south. At least from 715 BC onwards Egypt was ceaselessly active in fomenting anti-Assyrian feeling in remaining Palestinian states, and the possibility of recovering national sovereign independence from Assyria by means of an Egyptian alliance was a constant temptation to the politically ambitious leaders of Judah. Isaiah resolutely opposed this — holding to the truth he enunciated in the Ephraim oracle (17:1-11) that *worldly alliance was a death warrant*. Consequently, the burden of 19:1-15 is to dissuade his people from having anything to do with a people itself destined to collapse.... *In 19:1-15 the smiting of Egypt is predicted, but this is followed by a vision of the healing of Egypt and the bringing of even the threatening superpowers, Egypt and Assyria, into a spiritual union and unity with Israel (19:16-25). Then, by way of interim fulfillment — the imminent experience guaranteeing the undated — the smiting of Egypt is exemplified (20:1-6) in a particular historical event.*” [Motyer, *Isaiah*] “As is evident from chs. 30 and 31, the leaders of Judah were tempted to rely more and more upon Egypt as the eighth century drew toward a close and as Assyria’s threat loomed larger and larger. *Isaiah’s word was the same as it had been concerning Assyria earlier: whatever we trust in place of God will eventually turn on us and destroy us. Why trust Egypt, he asks, when Egypt has nothing to offer you that you do not already have (ch 19)? Why trust Egypt when recent history shows she will betray you (ch 20)? Why not trust the God who holds Egypt in the palm of His hand and to whom Egypt must one day turn?*” [Oswalt, *Isaiah*] There was only once

when Egypt attempted to make good on its promises of political support: in 701 BC the Egyptian army was routed by the Assyrians at El Tekeh, north of Ashdod, during Senacherib's invasion.

MAN'S HELPLESSNESS WHEN CONFRONTED BY THE LORD — Similar expressions in the OT where the Lord "rides" swift clouds are Deut 33:26; Ps 18:10-15; 68:33; 104:3; Dan 7:13. In Ps 18 the Lord swooped down to rescue David from Saul; now Egypt is portrayed as a threat to David's kingdom and the Lord is *swift* to react. The idols tremble and men's hearts melt within them. *"Jehovah rides upon clouds when He is about to reveal Himself in His judicial majesty (Ps 18:11); and in this instance He rides upon a light cloud, because it will take place rapidly."* [K&D, Isaiah]

THE JUDGEMENT — Social collapse — of relationships (v2), commerce (v3a), religion (v3b), and government (v4). By the hand of judgement, the two kingdoms of northern / southern Egypt are divided once again (Upper and Lower Egypt). In such a time of social collapse, the governmental decays into an authoritarian dictatorship which is the world's natural response to unrest (*America, heed the call!*). This effected them spiritually: "When a people begin to lose their way, especially a normally complacent and self-confident people like the Egyptians, depression settles on them suddenly. They do not have much resilience. That attitude is what Isaiah describes here. They will be despondent, lacking in spirit. When that happens, spirit is easily replaced by spiritism (v3)." [Oswalt, Isaiah] The fulfillment of this is uncertain, with possible choices being the rule of Piankhi himself (715BC), Sargon's conquest (cp Isa 20:1-6), Senacherib, or the invasion of Egypt by Esarhaddon (680 BC), Ashurbanipal (668 BC), or Artaxerxes III Ochus (343 BC). *"But much more important is the recognition that social problems arise from a spiritual root: the coming of the Lord in judgement (v1) and His direct action in human affairs (v2-4). Divisiveness (v2) and ineffectiveness (v3a) are symptoms, not maladies. Those who flocked to the cults at least saw that a spiritual solution was needed even though their solution was in fact another symptom of the real problem. Faced with all this disintegration, why not try force where appeal has failed (v4) ? If people will not do what they ought to do, they will do what they are made to do! But this also is a symptom, not the malady: the malady (v1) is that they are not right with God."* [Motyer, Isaiah] Throughout her history Egypt was prone to dissolution. After six strong dynasties that lasted 800 years (3000 - 2200 BC), there came a 200 year period in which the 42 largest cities became a country unto itself and chaos reigned. Then the 12th dynasty united the land for about 200 years (1990 - 1785 BC), then Egypt had another 200 years of fragmentation. Historians state this happened again and again. **Economic collapse** — The commentators agree: *"It is not an overstatement to say that without the Nile there would be no Egypt."* The canals and streams (v6) were used to carry water throughout the farmlands of Egypt. First the crops fail then erosion comes (v7). As the river dries up, the fishing industry collapses (v8) as does the manufacturing of flax (v9,10). Egypt was well advanced in its weaving of flax into cloth, but both the growing of the flax and the process of making the flax into linen were dependent upon the waters of the Nile. "It is well known that Egypt derives its great fertility entirely from the overflowing of the Nile. So important is this, that a public record is made at Cairo of the daily rise of the water. When the Nile rises to a less height than twelve cubits, a famine is the inevitable consequence, for then the water does not overflow the land. When it rises to a greater height than sixteen cubits, a famine is almost as certain — for then the superabundant waters are not drained off soon enough to allow them to sow the seed. The height of the inundation, therefore, that is necessary in order to insure a harvest, is from twelve to sixteen cubits. The annual overflow is in the month of August. The prophet here means that the Nile would not rise to the height that was desirable — or the waters should 'fail' — and that the consequence would be a famine." [Barnes,

Notes on OT] **Political collapse** — folly ruled throughout Pharaoh's cabinet. They gave foolish counsel (v13), were uncertain as to what to do (v14) and helpless to correct the situation (v15). This was universal: as we've seen before in Isaiah, *the head or tail, palm branch or reed* speaks of both the "great" men in society and the lower, meaner men as well. ***"The Egyptian wisdom literature, probably growing out of the highly organized court life, is some of the earliest and best preserved known to us. The same is true of their reflections on the nature and meaning of life. yet the Israelite prophet has the audacity to say that this tradition for wisdom is of no more value than the other two areas. This is so ... because Yahweh is able to frustrate their plans, while they cannot discover his."*** [Oswalt, Isaiah] ***"The nation has been so perverted by false counsels and hopes, that it lies there like a drunken man in his own vomit, and gropes and rolls about, without being able to find any way of escape."*** [K&D, Isaiah]

THE WISDOM OF THIS WORLD PERISHES — this same condition Isaiah describes is also mentioned by Paul when he wrote to the Corinthians: *"For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written: 'I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate.' 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? ... For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength. Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things — and the things that are not — to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him."* (1 Cor 18-20, 25-31) ***This is unsaved man's problem: sinful pride makes a god of his own intelligence, and from time to time the Lord reaches down to show man his error.*** Just this week in discussing the national elections with a liberal unsaved work companion, the comment was made by this man that the northeast of the country all voted liberal because "that's an old section of the country and there's a lot of intelligence up there." He went on to contrast that with the "massive ignorance" of the Bible belt south which voted conservative. This is exactly what the Lord is talking about, both in Isaiah and by Paul: ***man rejects the answers (the word of God) and then spends the rest of his life trying to fix the problems which arise from disobedience.*** I have truly believed for years there are good men (in the human sense) in political leadership which work for what they believe with all their heart. ***The problem is not their devotion nor motive; the problem is they've rejected God's counsel and therefore their wisdom does nothing but multiply society's problems.*** The answer might be found in that which they mock: those little old men and women who live in the word of God, believe it and obey it.

ZOAN AND MEPHIS — Zoan (v11,13) was situated in the north-eastern delta and was effectively the capital of Egypt at the time of the Ethiopian Dynasty. Oswalt equates it with Tanis, the chief city of northern Egypt from the middle Bronze age onward. Memphis was the other great city in northern (Lower) Egypt. It is Greek for the Egyptian Mennofer which would have been menoph in the Hebrew. It is sometimes rendered moph (Hos 9:6) and sometimes noph (Isa 19:13).

3. Egypt in Confusion (19:16-25)

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. 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. 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. 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. 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. 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. 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. In that day there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria. The

In that day shall Egypt be like unto women: and it shall be afraid and fear because of the shaking of the hand of the LORD of hosts, which he shaketh over it. And the land of Judah shall be a terror unto Egypt, every one that maketh mention thereof shall be afraid in himself, because of the counsel of the LORD of hosts, which he hath determined against it. In that day shall five cities in the land of Egypt speak the language of Canaan, and swear to the LORD of hosts; one shall be called, The city of destruction. In that day shall there be an altar to the LORD in the midst of the land of Egypt, and a pillar at the border thereof to the LORD. And it shall be for a sign and for a witness unto the LORD of hosts in the land of Egypt: for they shall cry unto the LORD because of the oppressors, and he shall send them a savior, and a great one, and he shall deliver them. And the LORD shall be known to Egypt, and the Egyptians shall know the LORD in that day, and shall do sacrifice and oblation; yea, they shall vow a vow unto the LORD, and perform it. And the LORD shall smite Egypt: he shall smite and heal it: and they shall return even to the LORD, and he shall be intreated of them, and shall heal them. In that day shall there be a highway out of Egypt to Assyria, and the Assyrian shall come into Egypt, and the Egyptian into Assyria,

In that day is Egypt like women, And it hath mourned, and been afraid, Because of the waving of the hand of Jehovah of Hosts, That He is waving over it. And the land of Judah hath been to Egypt for a cause of staggering, Every one who doth mention it, for himself feareth, Because of the counsel of Jehovah of Hosts, That He is counselling against it. In that day there are five cities in the land of Egypt, Speaking the lip of Canaan, And swearing to Jehovah of Hosts, 'The city of destruction,' is said of one. In that day there is an altar to Jehovah In the midst of the land of Egypt, And a standing pillar near its border to Jehovah, And it hath been for a sign and for a testimony, To Jehovah of Hosts in the land of Egypt, For they cry unto Jehovah from the face of oppressors, And He sendeth to them a saviour, Even a great one, and hath delivered them. And known hath been Jehovah to Egypt, And the Egyptians have known Jehovah in that day, And done sacrifice and present, And vowed a vow to Jehovah, and completed [it]. And Jehovah hath smitten Egypt, smiting and healing, And they have turned back unto Jehovah, And He hath been entreated of them, And hath healed them. In that day is a highway out of Egypt to Asshur, And come in have the Assyrians to Egypt, And the

Assyrians will go to Egypt and the Egyptians to Assyria. The Egyptians and Assyrians will worship together. In that day Israel will be the third, along with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing on the earth. The LORD Almighty will bless them, saying, “Blessed be Egypt my people, Assyria my handiwork, and Israel my inheritance.”
(NIV)

and the Egyptians shall serve with the Assyrians. In that day shall Israel be the third with Egypt and with Assyria, even a blessing in the midst of the land: Whom the LORD of hosts shall bless, saying, Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel mine inheritance. (KJV)

Egyptians into Asshur, And the Egyptians have served with the Assyrians. In that day is Israel third, After Egypt, and after Asshur, A blessing in the heart of the earth. In that Jehovah of Hosts did bless it, saying, ‘Blessed [is] My people — Egypt, And the work of My hands — Asshur, And Mine inheritance — Israel!’ (YLT)

THE HEALING OF EGYPT — “Divine hostility is not the last word. Alongside the world’s problem (v1-15), Isaiah places the Lord’s solution. He sets out a series of five *in that day* statements. In his actions given in verses 1-15 the Lord has not finished with Egypt. The Day will reveal other aspects of what he proposes to do.” [Motyer, *Isaiah*] *“This section fist [Isaiah’s] purposes well. Verses 1-15 have negated all the Egyptian attributes which might draw Judah to Egypt. Verses 16-25 are saying it is foolish for Judah to turn to Egypt when Egypt is one day going to turn to Judah’s God. In short, Judah already has the only thing of a positive nature which Egypt will one day have.”* [Oswalt, *Isaiah*]

In that day: the fear of the Lord — Isaiah first instills the fear of the Lord, seeing an uplifted hand which causes Egypt to shudder with fear and be terrified (v16,17). Yet as disturbed as the Egyptians were, *they did not know their fear was the beginning of wisdom (Prov 1:7).*

In that day: one language, one Lord — All will speak the language of Canaan and swear their allegiance unto the true God of Israel. The general sense of this verse is clear: *following the fear of the Lord, Egypt will turn to the Lord and give evidence of their faith by speech and action, both outwardly and inwardly.* Some of the details however are difficult. What are the *five cities*? Why are they (each?) or one of them called *city of destruction*? Calvin suggests the sense is proportional: out of six cities, five would turn to the Lord but one would be marked for destruction; but Oswalt states this goes against the sense of the text. *The city of destruction* has been discussed by commentators for years, especially with the discovery of manuscripts which read the Hebrew word *cheres* instead of *heres*, meaning the verse would read *City of the Sun* or *Heliopolis* (the biblical city of On), the seat of the great Egyptian sun-god Ra worship. The sense then would be the worship of the Lord would go throughout Egypt, even converting the most pagan of the ancient cities. Keil argues against this however and states the text as it stands is actually mocking the city of Heliopolis, playing on the words to say the *City of the Sun (Ir-hacheres)* will one day be the *City of Destruction (Ir-haheres)*.

In that day: five marks of true religion — (1) an altar or *place of reconciliation*, and a monument on the border indicating *the Lord dwells there and the land belongs to Him*; v19. (2) *prayer*: dangers are met and problems solved; v20. (3) *revelation*: the Lord will make Himself known to the Egyptians; v21a. *“True religion is not people searching after God but people responding to revealed truth.”* [Motyer, *Isaiah*] (4) *worship* expressed publically in offerings and sacrifices, and privately in the keeping of their vows unto the Lord; v21b. *“True worship has two*

aspects: first there is our approach to God through the means of grace He has provided: the sacrificial system (cp Heb 10:12-22); then there is our response to Him in the vowed dedication of ourselves (cp Rom 12:1,2) and the implementing of those vows in persistency of obedience.” [Motyer, *Isaiah*] (5) *providential discipline*, never a favorite of believers but a necessary sign of true sonship; v22. Whom the Lord loves He disciplines (Heb 12:1-11) and all tribulation finds a purpose in the kingdom of God. One aspect of tribulation therefore is to turn them to Him, Egypt coming back as penitents, looking trustingly to Him and receive His healing.

In that day: worldwide harmony in worship — First there was a few, then five cities, then the entire nation, and now the whole world (v23). Those who were once enemies will now bow together in prayer and worship. *Highway* is what we would call a causeway or raised road, therefore impossible to miss. “*There shall be a highway: A communication; that is, there shall be an alliance between Egypt and Assyria, as constituting parts of one empire, and as united in the service of the true God.... Alexander, by his conquests, subjected Assyria and Egypt, and they constituted parts of his empire and were united under him. It was true, also, that there were large numbers of Jews in both these countries, and that they were united in the service of the true God. They worshipped him in those countries; and they met at Jerusalem at the great feasts, and thus Judah, Assyria, and Egypt, were united in his worship. And the Assyrian shall come into Egypt: There shall be free and uninterrupted contact between the two nations, as parts of the same empire..... In that day shall Israel be the third: That is, the three shall be united as one people. Instead of being rival, hostile, and contending kingdoms, they shall be united and friendly; and instead of having different and jarring religions, they shall all worship the same God. The prophecy rather refers to the spread of the true religion, and the worship of the true God, than to a political or civil alliance.*” [Barnes, *Notes on OT*]

In that day: worldwide peace and unity under one Lord — Those converted will now know the peace of knowing the Lord: note the use of *my* three times in v25. In the exodus, Moses cried unto Pharaoh for him to “*let my people go*” — now the Egyptians themselves are the people of the Lord too!

FULFILLMENT? — “[One commentator] supposes that it refers to times succeeding the destruction of the army of Sennacherib. After that event, he says, the affairs of Egypt were thrown into confusion ... [which was] followed by a tyranny of twelve princes, who divided the country between them, until the distracted affairs settled down under the dominion of Psammetichus, who held the scepter for fifty-four years. Not long after this, the country was invaded and conquered by Nebuchadnezzar; and then by the Persians under Cambyses, the son of Cyrus. Alexander the Great subsequently invaded and took the country, and made Alexandria the capital of his empire. Many Jews were invited there by Alexander, and under the favor of the Ptolemies they flourished there; the true religion became prevalent in the land, and multitudes of the Egyptians, it is supposed, were converted to the Jewish faith.” [Barnes, *Notes on OT*] Grogan however disagrees:

“Although one or more historical fulfillments of such a prediction could be plausibly suggested, it is evident that the final fulfillment of vv. 16-25 has not yet come, unless it is all to be viewed as fulfilled spiritually in the triumphs of the gospel in Egypt.... It may seem that there is no greater height this oracle could reach; but, if anything, vv. 24-25 go further still. Israel, which seems for a time to have been right out of the picture, now takes her place as one member of a trio of godly states. Some of Israel’s own titles (cf., e.g., 1:3; 45:11) are applied to her former enemies. This strongly suggests not that the new situation is viewed as a temporary one, soon to give way to a return of old antagonisms and reconversion to paganism, but that the Lord has

established a covenant relationship with these nations, perhaps extending to them the new covenant that he promised in Jeremiah to make with his people of Israel and Judah (cf. Jer 31:31-34).” [Grogan, Isaiah]

4. Egypt and Ethiopia: A False Hope (20:1-6)

In the year that the supreme commander, sent by Sargon king of Assyria, came to Ashdod and attacked and captured it — at that time the LORD 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. Then the LORD said, “Just as my servant Isaiah has gone stripped and barefoot for three years, as a sign and portent against Egypt and Cush, so the king of Assyria will lead away stripped and barefoot the Egyptian captives and Cushite exiles, young and old, with buttocks bared — to Egypt’s shame. Those who trusted in Cush and boasted in Egypt will be afraid and put to shame. 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?’ ” (NIV)

In the year that Tartan came unto Ashdod, (when Sargon the king of Assyria sent him,) and fought against Ashdod, and took it; At the same time spake the LORD by Isaiah the son of Amoz, saying, Go and loose the sackcloth from off thy loins, and put off thy shoe from thy foot. And he did so, walking naked and barefoot. And the LORD said, Like as my servant Isaiah hath walked naked and barefoot three years for a sign and wonder upon Egypt and upon Ethiopia; So shall the king of Assyria lead away the Egyptians prisoners, and the Ethiopians captives, young and old, naked and barefoot, even with their buttocks uncovered, to the shame of Egypt. And they shall be afraid and ashamed of Ethiopia their expectation, and of Egypt their glory. And the inhabitant of this isle shall say in that day, Behold, such is our expectation, whither we flee for help to be delivered from the king of Assyria: and how shall we escape? (KJV)

In the year of the coming in of Tartan to Ashdod, when Sargon king of Asshur sendeth him, and he fighteth against Ashdod, and captureth it, at that time spake Jehovah by the hand of Isaiah son of Amoz, saying, ‘Go, and thou hast loosed the sackcloth from off thy loins, and thy sandal thou dost draw from off thy foot,’ and he doth so, going naked and barefoot. And Jehovah saith, ‘As My servant Isaiah hath gone naked and barefoot three years, a sign and a wonder for Egypt and for Cush, so doth the king of Asshur lead the captivity of Egypt, and the removal of Cush, young and old, naked and barefoot, with seat uncovered — the nakedness of Egypt; and they have been affrighted and ashamed of Cush their confidence, and of Egypt their beauty, and the inhabitant of this isle hath said in that day — Lo, thus [is] our trust, Whither we have fled for help, To be delivered from the king of Asshur, And how do we escape — we?’ (YLT)

“FOR EXAMPLE ...” — “This passage concludes Isaiah’s oracle against Egypt. As such it forms a graphic summary of the prophet’s opinion of trust in Egypt. Egypt herself was under judgement, and reliance on her was useless. As an example, he takes the city of Ashdod, the northernmost of the five great Philistine cities, which lay about thirty-three miles west of Jerusalem and about two or three miles inland. When the Ethiopian Shabako was able to consolidate Upper and Lower Egypt in 714, he immediately began to foment rebellion against Sargon, who had been very busy for the better part of a decade quashing revolts in Babylon and the northwest (Urartu). Perhaps Shabako felt safe in this situation. but events were to prove otherwise, for Sargon was rapidly getting the

upper hand over his adversaries and that was to be true as much in the west as it was elsewhere.” [Oswalt, *Isaiah*] Historically we know Egypt set up Ashdod as the leading city in the revolt against Assyria, removing the king who was favorable to Assyria and setting up one in sympathy to Egypt and the allies around 713 BC. Sargon reacted swiftly and regained control of Ashdod, the king fleeing to Egypt in 711 BC. “The Egyptians, faced with an Assyrian army on their borders, lost all of their bluster about defying Assyria and meekly handed over a bound Yamani [their puppet-ruler in Ashdod who fled to Egypt for protection], undertaking to send him all the way to Assyria. Undoubtedly, this action created a chill in the hearts of Egypt’s loyal allies and served to confirm the jaundiced view of Egypt held by people like Isaiah.” [Oswalt, *Isaiah*] “*In the year that Tartan came unto Ashdod*: Tartan was one of the generals of Sennacherib.... [Ashdod] was besieged and taken by Tartan as preparatory to the conquest of Egypt; and if the king who is here called Sargon was Sennacherib, it probable that it was taken before he threatened Jerusalem.” [Barnes, *Notes on OT*]

ISAIAH BECOMES A VISIBLE PARABLE — At some time during all this Isaiah is told by the Lord to go about stripped and barefoot (v2), showing to everyone the foolishness of trusting in Egypt. By this action, Isaiah was saying this would happen to all who put their faith in Egypt; i.e., they would be taken forcibly, stripped and forced to march to captivity. Isaiah did this for three years (v3). “Like the parables of Jesus, these actions were capable of being misconstrued by hardened hearts, but they certainly could not be overlooked. Here Isaiah was acting out the fate of captives. Although it was not always the case (some art objects picture captives clothed to a greater or lesser extent), captives were frequently striped naked when led into captivity. As much as anything else, such treatment would have a demoralizing effect upon the prisoners themselves and also on subject peoples who were watching. Of course, it also had a practical effect of increasing the difficulty of escape, but the chief aim seems to be public disgrace.” [Oswalt, *Isaiah*]

WAS ISAIAH NAKED? — It is generally accepted by the commentators I’ve read that Isaiah was not totally naked, the term being used culturally. “*The wording does not preclude the possibility that he was wearing a loincloth (cf. v. 4), for strict nakedness would have been religiously and socially unacceptable (cf. Gen 9:20-27).*” [Grogan, *Isaiah*] “It is not clear whether Isaiah appeared in public completely nude. The word ’ārôm can mean that (Gen 2:25), but it also seems to be used in situations where only partial nudity is intended (58:7; 1 Sam 19:24; Mic 1:8; cf. also Jn 21:7). Particularly in that society where the part was identified with the whole, partial nudity would have conveyed its point very effectively (cp 2 Sam 6:20). The practical as well as ethical problems with complete exposure suggest that such may have been the case here, although they do not rule out the other. Thus, the outer garment and the inner tunic would have been removed, leaving only the loin cloth.” [Oswalt, *Isaiah*] “With the great importance attached to the clothing in the East, where the feelings upon this point are peculiarly sensitive and modest, a person was looked upon as stripped and naked if he had only taken off his upper garment. What Isaiah was directed to do, therefore, was simply opposed to common custom, and not to moral decency. He was to lay aside the dress of a mourner and preacher of repentance, and to have nothing on but his tunic; and in this, as well as barefooted, he was to show himself in public. This was the costume of a man who had been robbed and disgraced, or else of a beggar or prisoner of war.” [K&D, *Isaiah*] “*Walking naked*: That is, walking ‘without this special prophetic garment.’ It does not mean that he was in a state of entire nudity, for all that he was directed to do was to lay this garment — this emblem of his office — aside. The word naked, moreover, is used in the Scriptures, not to denote an absolute destitution of clothing, but that the *outer garment* was laid aside. Thus it is said of Saul (1 Sam 19:24) that he ‘*stripped off his clothes also, and prophesied*

before Samuel, and lay down naked all that day;’ that is, he stripped off his royal robes, and was ‘*naked or unclothed*’ in that respect. He removed his special dress as a king, or military chieftain, and appeared in the ordinary dress. It cannot be supposed that the king of Israel would be seen literally without raiment. So David is said to have danced ‘naked’ before the ark, that is, with his royal robes laid aside.” [Barnes, *Notes on OT*]

THE LESSON TO THOSE TRUSTING IN EGYPT AND CUSH — Those who put their faith in Egypt and Cush will be embarrassed and ashamed of their misplaced trust (v5,6). Those *on the coast* is significant because after the battle of El Tekeh, the captives were led back to Assyria along the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. It does not say Egypt would be conquered but that Judah would see sad strings of captives being deported. This is said to have happened after the battle of El Tekeh (701 BC) when Egypt made their single attempt to keep their promises and failed.

“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.”

— Isaiah 19:22 NIV