



Isaiah 19:11-25

The Wisdom of Egypt Is Foolishness to God ~ Divine Grace for Egypt

Egypt was well known in the ancient world for its wisdom writings and its wise men. But Isaiah warned Egypt not to count on her wise men to save their nation from the coming destruction. The officials of Zoan, the wise counselors of Pharaoh, and the leaders of Memphis thought their wisdom might save them from their coming judgment. But their wisdom was foolishness compared with the wisdom of God who was planning the onslaught. No one in Egypt could do anything to avert the destruction; they were like staggering drunkards before the LORD. Neither the leaders nor the hold back God’s judgment.

The phrase “in that day” appears five times in this Isaiah 16-25. The phrase often refers to judgment followed by blessing. In 19:16-25 Isaiah emphasized the outcome of the judgment on Egypt; eventually Egypt will fear the Lord, realizing that He is the true God. This is a remarkable recovery for a nation that seemingly looks like it will be destroyed by the LORD.

English Standard (ESV)	Passion Notes	Passion Translation (TPT)
<p>Isaiah 19:11 The princes of Zoan are utterly foolish; the wisest counselors of Pharaoh give stupid counsel. How can you say to Pharaoh, “I am a son of the wise, a son of ancient kings”? ¹² Where then are your wise men? Let them tell you that they might know what the LORD of hosts has purposed against Egypt. ¹³ The princes of Zoan have become fools, and the princes of Memphis are deluded; those who are the cornerstones of her tribes have made Egypt stagger. ¹⁴ The LORD has mingled within her a spirit of confusion, and they will make Egypt stagger in all its deeds, as a drunken man staggers in his vomit. ¹⁵ And there will be nothing for Egypt that head or tail, palm branch or reed, may do.</p>	<p>m 19:11 That is, her leaders. Zoan, one of the oldest cities in the world, is in lower Egypt, known by the Greeks as Tunis. Zoan means “the place of departure” or “depressed, low region.” (See also v. 13.) In the fields of Zoan Moses worked miracles to prove to Pharaoh that God had sent him to demand the release of the Hebrews from their slavery.</p> <p>n 19:11 Or “I am a son of a wise man and a descendent of the (wise) Kedemite kings.”</p> <p>o 19:12 See 1 Cor. 1:18–31.</p> <p>p 19:13 Or “cornerstones,” a metaphor for Egypt’s rulers. Egypt was known for its wisdom, but the wisdom of this world (Egypt) has been found empty and vain. Christ is our wisdom (1 Cor. 1:30).</p> <p>q 19:15 The head represents leaders; the tail, lying prophets. See Isa. 9:14–15.</p> <p>r 19:15 Or “palm branch or reed,” a metaphor for the “strong or the weak, high or low.</p>	<p>The Wisdom of Egypt Is Foolishness to God</p> <p>Isaiah 19:11 The elite of Zoan m are nothing but fools, and the wisest of Pharaoh’s counselors gives foolish advice. How in the world can you say to Pharaoh, “I am a brilliant sage and a descendant of the ancient kings”? n ¹² Where, oh where, are all your sages? o If they’re so wise, let them discover and tell you what the Lord Yahweh, Commander of Angel Armies, has planned for Egypt. ¹³ Zoan’s elite have become utter fools; the nobles of Memphis are utterly deceived, and Egypt has been led astray by her tribal chiefs. p ¹⁴ The Lord Yahweh has mixed up their minds and poured into them a distorted spirit that will make Egypt dizzy and act like a drunk who staggers around in his own vomit. ¹⁵ There is nothing anyone in Egypt can do— neither head nor tail q nor anyone of high or low position. r</p>

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<p>¹⁶ In that day the Egyptians will be like women, and tremble with fear before the hand that the LORD of hosts shakes over them. ¹⁷ And the land of Judah will become a terror to the Egyptians. Everyone to whom it is mentioned will fear because of the purpose that the LORD of hosts has purposed against them.</p> <p>¹⁸ In that day there will be five cities in the land of Egypt that speak the language of Canaan and swear allegiance to the LORD of hosts. One of these will be called the City of Destruction.</p> <p>¹⁹ In that day there will be an altar to the LORD in the midst of the land of Egypt, and a pillar to the LORD at its border. ²⁰ It will be a sign and a witness to the LORD of hosts in the land of Egypt. When they cry to the LORD because of oppressors, he will send them a savior and defender, and deliver them. ²¹ And the LORD will make himself known to the Egyptians, and the Egyptians will know the LORD in that day and worship with sacrifice and offering, and they will make vows to the LORD and perform them. ²² And the LORD will strike Egypt, striking and healing, and they will return to the LORD, and he will listen to their pleas for mercy and heal them.</p> <p>²³ In that day there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria, and Assyria will come into Egypt, and Egypt into Assyria, and the Egyptians will worship with the Assyrians.</p> <p>²⁴ In that day Israel will be the third with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth, ²⁵ whom the LORD of hosts has blessed, saying, “Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel my inheritance.”</p>	<p>s 19:16 See Heb. 12:26–29.</p> <p>t 19:16 Or “hand.” The hand with its five fingers can be a metaphor for the five-fold ministry (Eph. 4:11).</p> <p>u 19:18 Possibly a figurative number (i.e., the five senses).</p> <p>v 19:18 That is, they will speak the language (Heb. “lip”) of the people of God—a language of hope, not despair; of love, not hatred; a spiritual language of all that is sacred and holy. See Isa. 50:4; Zeph. 3:9. The Hebrew word for Canaan means “to be humbled” or “to bend the knee.” The language of Canaan would be the language of humility.</p> <p>w 19:18 Or “each one.”</p> <p>x 19:18 Most Hebrew manuscripts have “the City of Destruction,” but the Dead Sea scroll 1QIsaa and a few medieval Hebrew manuscripts, along with the Targum and Vulgate, have “the City of the Sun (Hierapolis).” The other four Egyptian cities could be Leontopolis, Daphne, Migdol, and Memphis.</p> <p>y 19:19 There has been conjecture that this pillar (memorial) may be the great pyramid in Egypt and might have been built by Job (Egyptian name Cheops). Job was a grandson of Jacob and a nephew of Joseph, who went into Egypt with the Israelites. He is mentioned in Gen. 46:13 and 1 Chron. 7:1 as Jashub or, in the Masoretic text, Job. Others view this as a future monument built to glorify God.</p> <p>z 19:20 Or “savior.”</p> <p>aa 19:20 If God responds to the prayers of the “Egyptians” “Egyptians” (worldly people), how much more will he rescue his own people? See James 4:10; 2 Chron. 6:32–33.</p> <p>ab 19:21 In response to the plagues (Ex. 7–10), Pharaoh promised to let the children of Israel go but then took back that promise. Isaiah proclaims that this spirit of broken promises will be broken off Egypt.</p> <p>ac 19:23 The ancient Assyrian empire would include parts of northern Iraq, northwestern Iran, and southeastern Turkey.</p>	<p>¹⁶ In that day, the Egyptians will become like women who tremble in fear s because the Lord Yahweh, Commander of Angel Armies, shakes his fist t at them. ¹⁷ The land of Judah will become the dread of the Egyptians. They will quake whenever anybody even mentions it to them, because of what the Lord Yahweh, Commander of Angel Armies, has in store for them!</p> <p>Divine Grace for Egypt</p> <p>¹⁸ In that day, there will be five u Egyptian cities that speak the language of Canaan v and swear their allegiance to the Lord Yahweh, Commander of Angel Armies, and one w will be called the City of the Sun. x</p> <p>¹⁹ In that day, there will be an altar to the Lord Yahweh in the middle of Egypt and a sacred monument to honor him on its border. y ²⁰ It will be a sign and a visible reminder in the land of Egypt of the Lord Yahweh, Commander of Angel Armies. And they will cry out to him when they are oppressed, he will send a mighty deliverer z and champion to their rescue! aa ²¹ The Lord Yahweh will reveal to them who he really is, and the Egyptians will know him intimately. They will worship him with sacrifices and burnt offerings. They will make vows to the Lord Yahweh, and they will keep them. ab ²² The Lord Yahweh will wound the Egyptians, but when they turn back to him, he will heal them. Yes, the Lord Yahweh will listen to their hearts’ cry, and he will heal and restore them.</p> <p>²³ In that day there will be a highway all the way from Egypt to Assyria. ac Like long-lost brothers, the Egyptians and the Assyrians will be joined together and they will worship and serve the Lord Yahweh! ²⁴ And in that day, Israel will become the third partner with Egypt and Assyria as a blessing to all the earth. For the Lord Yahweh, Commander of Angel Armies, will bless them, saying, “Blessed be Egypt, my people! Blessed be Assyria, my handiwork! And blessed be Israel, my inheritance!”</p>

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- 18-22. In that day, etc. — Suffering shall lead to repentance. Struck with “terror” and “afraid” (Isaiah 19:17) because of Jehovah’s judgments, Egypt shall be converted to Him: nay, even Assyria shall join in serving Him; so that Israel, Assyria, and Egypt, once mutual foes, shall be bound together by the tie of a common faith as one people. So a similar issue from other prophecies (Isaiah 18:7; 23:18). five cities — that is, several cities, as in Isaiah 17:6; 30:17; Genesis 43:34; Leviticus 26:8. Rather, five definite cities of Lower Egypt (Isaiah 19:11, 13; Isaiah 30:4), which had close intercourse with the neighboring Jewish cities [MAURER]; some say, Heliopolis, Leontopolis (else Diospolis), Migdol, Daphne (Tahpanes), and Memphis. language of Canaan — that is, of the Hebrews in Canaan, the language of revelation; figuratively for, They shall embrace the Jewish religion: so “a pure language” and conversion to God are connected in Zephaniah 3:9; as also the first confounding and multiplication of languages was the punishment of the making of gods at Babel, other than the One God. Pentecost (Acts 2:4) was the counterpart of Babel: the separation of nations is not to hinder the unity of faith; the full realization of this is yet future (Zechariah 14:9; John 17:21). The next clause, “swear to the Lord of Hosts,” agrees with this view; that is, bind themselves to Him by solemn covenant (Isaiah 45:23; 65:16; Deuteronomy 6:13). city of destruction — Onias; “city of the sun,” that is, On, or Heliopolis; he persuaded Ptolemy Philometer (149 B.C.) to let him build a temple in the prefecture (nome) of Heliopolis, on the ground that it would induce Jews to reside there, and that the very site was foretold by Isaiah six hundred years before. The reading of the Hebrew text is, however, better supported, “city of destruction “; referring to Leontopolis, the site of Onias’ temple: which casts a reproach on that city because it was about to contain a temple rivalling the only sanctioned temple, that at Jerusalem. MAURER, with some manuscripts, reads “city of defense” or “deliverance “; namely, Memphis, or some such city, to which God was about to send “a saviour” (Isaiah 19:20), to “deliver them.”
- 19. **altar** — not for sacrifice, but as the “pillar” for memorial and worship (Joshua 22:22-26). Isaiah does not contemplate a temple in Egypt: for the only legal temple was at Jerusalem; but, like the patriarchs, they shall have altars in various places. pillar — such as Jacob reared (Genesis 28:18; 35:14); it was a common practice in Egypt to raise obelisks commemorating divine and great events. at the border — of Egypt and Judah, to proclaim to both countries the common faith. This passage shows how the Holy Spirit raised Isaiah above a narrow-minded nationality to a charity anticipatory of gospel catholicity.
- 20. **it** — the altar and pillar. a sign — (of the fulfilment of prophecy) to their contemporaries. a witness — to their descendants. unto the Lord — no longer, to their idols, but to Jehovah. for they shall cry — or, “a sign . . . that they cried, . . . and He sent to them a saviour”; probably, Alexander the Great (so “a great one”), whom the Egyptians welcomed as a deliverer (Greek, Soter, a title of the Ptolemies) out of the hands of the Persians, who under Cambyses had been their “oppressors.” At Alexandria, called from him, the Old Testament was translated into Greek for the Greek-speaking Jews, who in large numbers dwelt in Egypt under the Ptolemies, his successors. Messiah is the antitype ultimately intended (compare Acts 2:10, “Egypt”).
- 21. **oblation** — unbloody.
- 22. **return** — for heathen sin and idolatry are an apostasy from primitive truth. heal — as described (Isaiah 19:18-20).
- 23. **highway** — free communication, resting on the highest basis, the common faith of both (Isaiah 19:18; Isaiah 11:16). Assyria and Egypt were joined under Alexander as parts of his empire: Jews and proselytes from both met at the feasts of Jerusalem. A type of gospel times to come. serve with — serve Jehovah with the Assyrians. So “serve” is used absolutely (Job 36:11).

- 24. **third** — The three shall be joined as one nation. blessing — the source of blessings to other nations, and the object of their benedictions. in the midst of the land — rather, “earth” (Micah 5:7). Judah is designed to be the grand center of the whole earth (Jeremiah 3:17).
- 25. **Whom** — rather, “Which,” namely, “the land,” or “earth,” that is, the people of it [MAURER]. my people — the peculiar designation of Israel, the elect people, here applied to Egypt to express its entire admission to religious privileges (Romans 9:24-26; 1 Peter 2:9, 10). work of my hands — spiritually (Hosea 2:23; Ephesians 2:10).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. When reading through Isaiah 19, it sounds like God has somewhat of a “love/hate” relationship with Egypt. What is it that you think might have happened between God “shaking his fist at them” in verse 16 and them building an “alter to God” in verse 19 that caused such a change?
2. Some people have an easier time believing that Jesus is disappointed with them and will only love them when they finally get their act together, than they do believing that he loves them right where they are. Why is it that so many believers are so hesitant to receive God’s *agape* love?
3. It says in verses 20-21, when the Egyptians were being oppressed, the LORD “will send them a savior and defender, and deliver them. And the LORD will make himself known to the Egyptians, and the Egyptians will know the LORD in that day and worship with sacrifice and offering.” Describe a time when you felt like Jesus set you free from something/someone that was oppressing you. Was your response to worship Jesus? What would be a contemporary form of “sacrifice and offering” that we might bring to God from a grateful heart?
4. In your experience, what are some of the ways you've seen God demonstrate his love toward people who don't deserve it? Think of someone you know personally who you are pretty sure doesn't deserve God's love because of what they have done in their life. What tangible thing could *you* do to show them the love of Jesus in the next 24 hours?