

Isaiah Chapters 19-20 - John Karmelich

Title: Why we should care about Egypt!

When most Christians think about Egypt, we realize that nation has a history with the Israelites and it's now a small player on the world stage and currently a mostly Muslim nation. As most of us realize the nation of Israel was born in Egypt at a time when they were a mighty power in the Middle East. At the time Isaiah wrote his book, Egypt was still a powerful entity, who many Israelites hoped they'd protect them from the threats of both the Assyrian Empire (on the march at Isaiah's time), plus the Babylonian Empire roughly a century later that conquered and took over the Assyrian Empire. In short, Egypt was a significant force back then. After those two empires ended, Egypt became insignificant! Ezekiel 29 (Verse 15) about a hundred years after Isaiah says Egypt will be the lowest of nations. Remember that Egypt ruled over the Middle East for over a millennium. Ezekiel's prediction became literally true, and that has been the case for about 2,500 years now and counting!

All that history leads to my lesson title: Why we should care about the future of Egypt! I'll assume we are roughly aware of most of Egypt's history. Here in these chapters Isaiah talks about the downfall the nation of Egypt will have and again it's "old news" to us. The good news for Egypt is God says He will bless that nation one day and it'll become a God-fearing nation. The text even says a highway will exist from Egypt to Assyria. Obviously, there were no cars then. Further, Assyria is long gone, but Isaiah is using terms his audience will recognize. My personal view is after Jesus "sets up shop" in Israel, there will be a modern highway that runs from Egypt through Israel to Iraq, where Assyrian was located. So why should I care about that?

Part of the answer is if God can resurrect Egypt as a nation after millennia of idolatry, and worship of a false god and multiple false deities, what does that mean for anyone who has given their lives to Christ despite their backgrounds? It means there is always hope even for the believer who messes up and isn't living as God desires at this moment! So, if Egypt as a nation can one day be a witness for God despite the fact they "got their rear kicked" by the Exodus, and should have known better, and despite that they turned from Christianity and became a Muslim nation about 700 AD (more or less), what does that say for hope in God despite all that history? By reading these historical events and His plans for Egypt is a lesson for us about God's eternal plans for believers and reminds us how much He cares for all people! I'll put it this way: If God will do wonderful things in Egypt's future, shouldn't that remind us of God's eternal plans for those of us who trust in Him despite how much we sin in this life?

With all of that out of my system, let me discuss these two chapters a bit: I am always fascinated when the text says God is going to focus "there". I always think of God being everywhere. So, when Isaiah's saying God is going to work in Egypt it's the idea that a "big picture" idea is at work that is going to be an example for us of how God works in our life. Remember the Israelites then were making a mistake to trust in Egypt as opposed to God from the threat of the growing Assyrian Empire (coming out of the area of Iraq in today's geography). The opening few verses say in effect God's going to "kick Egypt in the rear one more time" on a scale not seen before in Middle East history. Again, remember Egypt was a major player at that time and dominated for at least a millennium. Their only major downfall was the time Israel left Egypt when they were at the peak of their power. Because Israel wanted to flee there in fear of Assyria, God's saying here is what's going to happen to Egypt and it's not good. The text speaks of internal strife with one city in Egypt fighting another for power. Isaiah says the Egyptians turned to

sorcery (God always condemns that as we're not looking to Him). Isaiah then insults Egypt's leader for saying he is listening to bad advice of his counselors and that will be their downfall.

One of the fascinating things is modern scholars from a generation ago argue that when Egypt built up a major dam on the Nile River that caused permanent damage. As I always argue, prophesy is patterns, so it may be second fulfilment. My guess is soon after Isaiah wrote this, there was a no rain for a year that caused the temporary death of the Nile. Bottom line, things were bad for Egypt at that time! OK, too bad for the Egyptians 2,600 years ago, what does any of that have to do with me today?

The point is God changes the topic in Verse 16 to give Israel hope. It literally describes a future day in (obviously after Jesus returns) with a highway from Egypt to Iraq through Israel. The text says those in Egypt then will speak Hebrew. It reminds us Hebrew will be the official language when Jesus "sets up shop", so I assume God will help us to understand that language! Isaiah also speaks of a monument on the border and in the middle of Egypt. Let me explain that one: An established border existed between "upper and lower" Egypt. That's how it can be in the middle of Egypt and the border. Some argue that the great pyramid is that monument, but it's debated!

Bottom line, just as God has a great eternal plan for those of us who trust in Him, so He'll forgive those who have called on His name and promises us a great eternal future! Meanwhile, Isaiah was still asked to lecture the Israelites on not trusting in Egypt. In Chapter 20, Verses 1-2 was written when the leader of Assyria captured one of the Philistine cities (in the land of Israel). The reason for that time marker is that time is when Isaiah was called to preach against trusting Egypt!

If you ever thought being a prophet was a "cool gig", realize at this point Isaiah was called to preach to the Israelites naked for three years! Some argue it was only part of the day, others argued it was only a partial nakedness. I argue, "God says what He means" unless it's obviously meant as a metaphor like in Psalm 91:4 where David says he's resting under God's wings (God is not a bird!). My point is if Isaiah was called to preach naked for three years publicly, I'm not sure I want that job! A reason for that is the Assyrians were famous for marching their captives naked and "strung together" with hooks in their lips to the next person! Bottom line this short chapter is designed to teach the Israelites to trust in God and not other powers in the area. No, they didn't listen and let's just say they suffered for it!

OK John, I have no plans to preach naked, nor do I have to fear Egypt being overrun. How does any of this affect our ministry for Jesus? First, it's the reminder that God has wonderful eternal plans for us. If God can one day turn Egypt and Iraq from being Muslim to Christianity and there will be a highway in the desert through those three nations, it's a reminder that: 1. God always gets the last word. 2. We are called to use our lives to glorify Him and be a witness to the world around us! 3. The text's a reminder that there's eternal rewards for asking for His gift of eternal forgiveness and whatever the cost we must pay in this lifetime, is nothing to compared to an eternity that God's preparing for those of us who trust in Him. So, if we're betting on God, how do we know all of this is true? One of the reasons 30% of the Bible is predictions is to validate the bible as the word of God. History happened in the Middle East as Isaiah said it would. Patterns of those who turned from God have been repeating ever since. Accepting the fact God interferes in the affairs of man to guide the world the way He desires it to go, is obvious if we notice the signs and patterns! Bottom line, it is worth the trouble to trust the Bible and trust that we "bet on the winning horse" in this eternal saga.

With that said, hope you like this study. I wrote a more detailed one some years back. If you want to read that, click on one of the links below. It is still a joy to study this stuff and again I'm grateful for

you reading this. The rest of this email is links to questions you may have. If you're new here, you're always welcome to e-mail me. Thanks again for reading this!

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That's it. Hope you enjoy it. Don't forget to fire up a prayer prior to your reading.