

The Prophecy Against Egypt ~ Part 1

Yesha'hayu 19:1-10

In my last post, we examined **The Woes of Cush (modern Ethiopia)** in **Yesha'hayu 18:1-7**. In this post, we explore **The Prophecy Against Egypt ~ Part 1** in **Yesha'yahu 19:1-10**.

¹ This is a prophecy about Egypt: Look! Adonai is riding a swift cloud on His way to Egypt. Before Him, Egypt's idols tremble, Egypt's courage melts within them.

Egypt is a divided nation during this time. The effort to unite all **Egypt** had stalled. The *swift cloud*, a storm cloud, is God's war chariot. The image is found elsewhere in Scripture (Psalm 18:10; 68:33; 104:3; Nahum 1:3). ***Egypt's idols tremble*** again, just as the plagues were described as a victory over **Egypt's** gods at the time of the Exodus (Exodus 12:12).

² "I will incite Egypt against Egypt, brother will fight against brother, friend against friend, city against city, kingdom against kingdom.

The Lord had no shortage of ways to bring nations down. In the case of the **Egyptians**, He used civil war. During much of the eighth century, **Egypt** was at war with itself. There were conflicts between power centers at Tanis, Thebes, and in the delta. Not until 712 BCE was **Egypt** united under one pharaoh, the Cushite king Shabaka.

³ The courage of Egypt will ebb away within it; I will reduce its counsel to confusion. They will consult idols and mediums, ghosts and spirits.

Egyptian religion was filled with many gods and mysterious rites, but this verse describes a darker religious turn born out of frustration. One would think the **Egyptians** would not have resorted to idolatry following the poor showing of their wizards at the time of the Exodus. But, as seen here, such was not the case.

⁴ I will hand over the Egyptians to a cruel master. A harsh king will rule them," says the Lord, Adonai-Tzva'ot.

It's not all that clear who the cruel masters were, but **Nebuchadnezzar** may have been the first that ruled **Egypt**, followed by a succession of oppressive **Persian** kings.

⁵ The water will ebb from the sea; the river will be drained dry. ⁶ The rivers will become foul, the canals of Egypt's Nile will dwindle and dry up, the reeds and rushes will wither. ⁷ The river-plants on the banks of the Nile and everything sown near the Nile will dry up, blow away and be no more.

Egyptian agriculture and commerce were utterly dependent on the **Nile River** system. They were fortunate in that the **Nile** was a predictable and manageable river. Its inundations occurred on a regular schedule (carefully recorded by scribes and kept in official repositories). Failure of the **Nile's** flood would mean poor harvests and the destruction of its industries (especially flax). The **Nile's** banks could be cut with canals and irrigation channels to expand the size of fields and the movement of light shipping. Also, the controlled flooding of the **Nile** brought fertile silt to **Egyptian** fields, ensuring abundant crops and lessening the need for fertilizing or crop rotation. Travel was also based on movement up and down the **Nile**. There was constant, heavy barge traffic carrying grain and other raw materials, manufactured goods, and building stones.¹

⁸ Fishermen too will lament, all who cast hooks in the Nile will mourn, those who spread nets on the water lose heart.

¹ The IVP Bible Background Commentary – Old Testament

The disappearance of the **Nile** waters will affect not only farmers but also those who make their living by fishing.

⁹ The linen-workers will be in despair, along with the weavers of white cotton; ¹⁰ the spinners will be crushed, the hired workers dejected. ~ Isaiah 19:1-10 (CJB)

The warm and humid climate in **Egypt** necessitated light clothing styles. Flax, cultivated since Neolithic times, was one answer to this need. It provided both food (seeds and linseed oil) as well as a fiber that could be woven into linen cloth. In **Egypt** flax was tightly planted (to increase height and prevent branching) in late October and harvested at the height of three feet in April or May. Younger plants were pulled up by the roots to produce fine linen, while older plants were used for ropes and belts. The stems were first soaked in tanks of stagnant water (retting) and then dried before the fibers were separated (Joshua 2:6). The dried stems were beaten, and the fibers combed out for spinning, with the longer threads being used for clothing and the shorter (tow) set aside as lamp wicks (1:31). There were several grades of linen produced. The best was set aside for the **Pharaoh**, the nobility and the priests. Any interruption in production would have had a ripple effect, destroying the livelihood of countless workers in the fields and factories. ²

The loss of this industry would lead to economic depression.

We have seen the fulfillment of this prophecy in our day. The theory behind the Aswan Dam, considered one of the great projects of modern technology, was that, by controlling the flow of the **Nile River, Egypt** could be more productive in her farming. But it ended up costing her over a million acres of farmland as silt was caught in the dam and salt water began to work its way up the **Nile**. The nutrients previously carried down the river no longer flowed. Instead, snails proliferated and destroyed the reeds just as Isaiah prophesied. ³

In my next post, we continue to explore **A Prophecy Against Egypt ~ Part 2** in **Yesha'yahu 19:11-25**.

² Ibid.

³ Jon Courson's Application Commentary Old Testament Volume 2.