

Text: Jer 46.11

Jer 46.11 is our opening text for tonight's study.

Jer 46.11 Go up to Gilead and obtain balm, O virgin daughter of Egypt!
In vain have you multiplied remedies; There is no healing for you.

We will mainly look at Ezekiel 29-30 and Isaiah 19 for this study, but the theme is

The Decline of Egypt

“In Ezekiel xxix. the approaching conquest of Egypt by Nebuchadnezzar is foretold. The Egyptians are to be led away into captivity and the land is to be desolate for forty years. At the end of that time they are to return, but *their greatness is not to be restored*. In accordance with the words we have quoted from Jeremiah, Egypt will in vain seek healing for her wound.”¹

I. The prophecies of Isaiah and Ezekiel against Egypt

The following outlines (Points A and B) come from my Thru the Bible study. The material is background. We will highlight specific verses in the prophecy and points in the outline tonight.

Key verses:

Isaiah 19.1-4 (Isaiah is writing around 740 BC)

Ezek 29.1-2, 9-16 (Ezekiel is writing while Nebuchadnezzar is active, before the fall of Jerusalem [586 BC] at this point)

A. Isaiah 19

Isaiah's next oracle focuses on Egypt and is a message of the folly for Judah or Israel to rely on Egypt as a source of help against their foes [the Assyrians and later the Babylonians] (Isa 19.1-25).

1. Egypt itself is subject to the judgement of God (Isa 19.1-4).
 - a. They will be plagued with internal strife (a judgement of God) (1-2).
 - b. They will be demoralized as their false gods fail them (3).

¹ John Urquhart, *The Wonders of Prophecy: Or, What Are We to Believe?* (New York: Gospel Publishing House, n.d.), 29.

- c. They themselves will suffer the oppression of a foreign power (4).
2. The fertility, prosperity and economy of Egypt will be utterly devastated (Isa 19.5-10).
3. The sooth saying and wisdom of Egypt's pagan counselors will be utterly useless (Isa 19.11-15).
4. The final section of the oracle reveals that 'in that day' [a phrase which recurs five times in the balance of the chapter: 16, 18-19, 21, 23, 24] a great change will come over Egypt (Isa 19.16-24).
 - a. 'In that day' Judah will control Egypt (16-17).
 - b. 'In that day' Egypt will swear allegiance to the Lord (18).
 - c. 'In that day' Egypt will worship the Lord (19-22).
 - d. 'In that day' Egypt will worship the Lord with Assyria, traveling on a highway that connects the two (23).
 - e. 'In that day' Egypt and Assyria along with Judah will be 'My people' and will be a blessing to all the earth.

The concluding portion of this chapter (Isa 19.16-24) is obviously still unfulfilled.

B. Ezek 29-30

1. Ezekiel 29

- a. Chapter 29 contains the first two of seven messages directed against Egypt.

"Each oracle is introduced by the clause, 'The word of the Lord came to me'; and six of the seven oracles are dated (29.1, 17; 30.1 [undated], 20; 31.1; 32.1, 17). Though 29.1; 30.20; 31.1; 32.1; and 32.17 are in chronological order, 29.17 (the second oracle) is dated later than the others. This departure from his usual chronological arrangement is probably because Ezekiel wanted to arrange the oracles in a logical progression. He possibly placed 29.17-21 where he did to clarify his first prophecy (29.1-16). After predicting that the Pharaoh and Egypt would be destroyed (29.1-16), he then specified who would destroy them (29.17-21)."²

² Charles H. Dyer, "Ezekiel," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983), 1285.

- b. The Pharaoh on the throne at this time was named **Hophra**. Like all pharaohs, he considered himself to be a god. The imagery of Ezek 29.3 portrays this attitude on the part of Pharaoh. God's lesson for Pharaoh is that he is not in control of his own destiny, God is (Ezek 29.3-6).
- c. Judah had foolishly relied on Egypt in the days of the Babylonian siege, but Egypt proved to be an unfaithful ally. Though this alliance was a lack of faith condemned by God (see Ezek 23), Egypt is held to account for her unfaithfulness (Ezek 29.7-9).
- d. The message to Egypt notes a 40-year dispersal and a return (Ezek 29.9b-16).
 - 1) Egypt fell to Nebuchadnezzar in 568 BC.
 - 2) Forty years later the Persians had destroyed Babylon and began their policy of returning captives to their homelands (the policy that would enable the Jews to return to Jerusalem).
 - 3) Egypt would never become strong enough again for Israel to be tempted to make them an ally — a situation that has continued in world affairs from that day to this. There are no more Pharaohs.
- e. The plunder of Egypt was God's reward to Nebuchadnezzar for doing His work at Tyre (Ezek 29.17-20).
- f. The invasion of Egypt is a little blast on the horn of hope for Israel: as he fulfilled this word, the prophecies of Ezekiel would become plain, and the words of regathering would gain strength in the minds of the hearers (Ezek 29.21).

2. Ezekiel 30

- a. This prophecy is undated, unlike the other prophecies against Egypt, but likely came in 587 BC, just before the fall of Jerusalem. (Ezek 30.1).
- b. The prophecy is broken into four parts by the phrase, "Thus says the Lord GOD" (Ezek 30.2, 6, 10, 13).
 - 1) The sword will come upon Egypt and her allies (2-5).

- 2) The sword in Egypt would bring terror to her allies – they could be next (6-9).
- 3) The sword that destroys Egypt would be none other than Nebuchadnezzar's – but really it is the Lord ("I will") that does it (10-12).
- 4) The gods of Egypt and all her major cities would be subjugated (13-19).

c. Even as the LORD breaks Egypt's arms, he is strengthening Babylon's arm (Ezek 30.20-26).

II. Understanding Egypt's history

A. Summary of Egypt's History

1. A world power under the Pharaohs

"To be convinced that this prediction was not due to human foresight, we have only to remember what Egypt was at the beginning of the Christian era, and for ages after. Even then she seemed worthy of the fame which fixed the World's gaze upon her in admiring reverence. She had been the mother of science and letters and art. At the fire which burned upon her hearth, the nations had kindled the lamp of knowledge, which has burned on age after age, and which now flames so brightly. Her greatness was unique. It was more true and human than that of any other ancient land save Greece; and she had the unity, and repose, and calm majesty, which Greece lacked. She stood alone among the nations, great, wise, self-respecting; around her the choicest treasures of earth; her land filled with imperishable monuments of might and skill, and genius; her people, in their order and enlightenment and civilization, a marvel to all time. The foundation of her greatness was not her military power, but the exhaustless wealth of her soil. That still remained; and, though she had felt the touch of decay, there was nothing in the time of our Lord to indicate that Egypt's day was past. It was within the range, not only of possibility, but of probability that she might yet again be mistress of her destiny, and that her old splendour might return. Her fertility won for her even then the title of 'the granary of the world.' Augustus, after the defeat of Antony, found so great wealth in Egypt that with it he paid

all the arrears due to his army, and the debts which he had incurred to meet the expenses of the war. 'It is said, too, that after all the spoliations the wealth and resources of Egypt appeared to him so formidable, that he was afraid to intrust that province to the charge of any man of rank or interest, lest he should raise up a rival to himself. He therefore committed the government of the country to Cornelius Gallus, a citizen of the equestrian order, and a person of very low extraction; he would not allow the city of Alexandria to possess any municipal council; and he declared all Egyptians incapable of being admitted into the Senate at Rome.' 'Till the moment of the Arabian conquest,' says Dr. Vincent, 'Alexandria continued the second city in the (Roman) empire in rank, and the first, perhaps, in wealth, commerce, and prosperity.'

"Even in the seventh century of our era Egypt was still so powerful that the Mohammedan hosts, though flushed with victory, hesitated to attack it. The event showed that their caution was not uncalled for. Babylon of Egypt, on the ruins of which the town of Fostat was built, detained them seven months. The siege of Alexandria lasted fourteen months, and the Arabs lost before it twenty-three thousand men; and, after all, its capture was due to internal treachery, and not to the superior power of the assailants. The sight of its magnificence and wealth filled the children of the East with amazement. "I have taken," said Amrou to the caliph, "the great city of the West. It is impossible for me to enumerate the variety of its riches and beauty, and I content myself with observing that it contains 4,000 palaces, 400 theatres or places of amusement, 12,000 shops for the sale of vegetable food, and 40,000 tributary Jews." The destruction of the royal library, which was distributed among the baths of the city, and which supplied them with fuel for six months, has been regarded as one of the greatest of the world's calamities. Alexandria did not stand alone. Its condition was an indication of the riches and strength of the whole country. It would have been impossible for the Arabs to have conquered Egypt, or to have afterwards held it, had not the people, groaning under the

oppression of their Greek masters, thrown themselves into the arms of the invaders.”³

2. Pharaoh Hophra defeated by Nebuchadnezzar [568 BC]
3. Captivity restored by the Persians after they defeated the Babylonians [539 BC]
4. Persian rule defeated by Alexander in 332 BC
 - a. Thereafter under the Greeks
 - b. The Ptolemys were Greek rulers
 - c. Last Ptolemy was Cleopatra, defeated by Augustus, and committed suicide [30 BC]
5. Roman rule – 30 BC to AD 641
6. Various Muslim empires ruled from 641 to 1922, when the British took over with a puppet king on the throne (British occupation began in 1882)
7. In 1953, an independent Republic came into being, with various men in charge

“After the Arab conquest the degeneration proceeded with rapid strides, till Egypt has become what it is today. Its science, and learning, and art, no less than its magnificence, and power, and prestige, have wholly perished. Along that pathway of the past everything that made the Egyptians what they were has been wholly lost.”⁴

Note: Urquhart wrote this before the 20th century.

B. Again, a look at some key verses

1. Ezek 29.14: “they will be a lowly kingdom”
2. Ezek 30.23: “there will no longer be a prince in Egypt” (No longer a native king, rulers came from other nations.)

³ Urquhart, *Wonders of Prophecy*, 29–31.

⁴ Urquhart, 31–32.

C. Last, let us look again at Isaiah 19.16-25

See point 4 of the Isaiah 19 outline above: “in that day” section

III. Application for modern Christians

A. God controls the fate of mighty nations: the great nations of today are

1. The United States of America
2. China
3. Russia
4. Great Britain, Germany, France
5. Iran

One can debate relative strength of these nations, but all these nations are great because God allows them to be great

B. God will work out the plan he has for history

1. The nations will collapse, ultimately, when a mighty ruler emerges to “solve the world’s problems”
2. The ruler will not be able to avoid disaster after disaster the Lord brings on him
3. The ruler will suffer defeat, ultimately, when the Lord Jesus returns and sets up the last kingdom
4. The nations, including Egypt, will make peace with him and worship in Jerusalem

Conclusion:

We need to look at prophecy, see what God has done, trust what God said he would do, and in the meantime simply serve him.