

Isaiah 19:1 – 20:6

Chiastic Structure of Isaiah 19:1 – 20:6¹

This section, called the 'oracle of Egypt' (19:1) is in a literary chiasm:

- A. The Smiting of Egypt Predicted (19:1 – 15)
- B. The Healing of Egypt (19:16 – 25)
- A'. The Smiting of Egypt Exemplified (20:1 – 6)

The chiasm structure is where the first point matches the last point. The second point matches the second to last point. And the center point is the main point.

Text of Isaiah 19:1 – 15

^{19:1} The oracle concerning Egypt.

Behold, the LORD is riding on a swift cloud

And is about to come to Egypt;

The idols of Egypt will tremble at His presence,

And the heart of the Egyptians will melt within them.

² 'So I will incite Egyptians against Egyptians;

And they will each fight against his brother

And each against his neighbor,

City against city

And kingdom against kingdom.

³ Then the spirit of the Egyptians will be demoralized within them;

And I will confound their strategy,

So that they will resort to idols and ghosts of the dead

And to mediums and spiritists.

⁴ Moreover, I will deliver the Egyptians into the hand of a cruel master,

And a mighty king will rule over them,' declares the Lord GOD of hosts.

⁵ The waters from the sea will dry up,

And the river will be parched and dry.

⁶ The canals will emit a stench,

The streams of Egypt will thin out and dry up;

The reeds and rushes will rot away.

⁷ The bulrushes by the Nile, by the edge of the Nile

And all the sown fields by the Nile

Will become dry, be driven away,

And be no more.

⁸ And the fishermen will lament,

And all those who cast a line into the Nile will mourn,

And those who spread nets on the waters will pine away.

⁹ Moreover, the manufacturers of linen made from combed flax

And the weavers of white cloth will be utterly dejected.

¹⁰ And the pillars of Egypt will be crushed;

All the hired laborers will be grieved in soul.

¹¹ The princes of Zoan are mere fools;

The advice of Pharaoh's wisest advisers has become stupid.

How can you men say to Pharaoh,

'I am a son of the wise, a son of ancient kings'?

¹² Well then, where are your wise men?

Please let them tell you,

And let them understand what the LORD of hosts

Has purposed against Egypt.

¹³ The princes of Zoan have acted foolishly,

A. Smiting of Egypt Predicted

Egypt: As Babylon's power rose in the region (Isa.13 – 14; 39), the kingdom of Judah considered allying with Egypt. Ironically, Egypt was the older imperial power, where Israel was once enslaved.

'This prophecy was fulfilled in 714 BC, when Piankhi's 25th Dynasty rose to power, causing widespread domestic strife in Egypt' (*Orthodox Study Bible*, p.1072). Egypt's livelihood was based on the Nile River.

Zoan: A city of Egypt in the eastern Nile delta. God, through Moses, did miracles in Zoan before Pharaoh to persuade him to release Israel (Ps.78:12, 43).

¹ J. Alec Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Interpretation and Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), p.135

The princes of Memphis are deluded;
 Those who are the cornerstone of her tribes
 Have led Egypt astray.
¹⁴ The LORD has mixed within her a spirit of distortion;
 They have led Egypt astray in all that it does,
 As a drunken man staggers in his vomit.
¹⁵ There will be no work for Egypt
 Which its head or tail, its palm branch or bulrush, may do.

¹⁶ In that day the Egyptians will become like women,
 and they will tremble and be in dread
 Because of the waving of the hand of the LORD of hosts,
 which He is going to wave over them.
¹⁷ The land of Judah will become a terror to Egypt;
 Everyone to whom it is mentioned will be in dread of it,
 Because of the purpose of the LORD of hosts
 Which He is purposing against them.
¹⁸ In that day five cities in the land of Egypt will be speaking the language of Canaan
 And swearing allegiance to the LORD of hosts;
 One will be called the City of Destruction.
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 near its border.
²⁰ It will become a sign and a witness to the LORD of hosts in the land of Egypt;
 For they will cry to the LORD because of oppressors,
 And He will send them a Savior and a Champion,
 And He will deliver them.
²¹ Thus the LORD will make Himself known to Egypt,
 And the Egyptians will know the LORD in that day.
 They will even worship with sacrifice and offering,
 And will make a vow to the LORD and perform it.
²² The LORD will strike Egypt,
 Striking but healing;
 So they will return to the LORD,
 And He will respond to them and will heal them.
²³ In that day there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria,
 And the Assyrians will come into Egypt and the Egyptians into Assyria,
 And the Egyptians will worship with the Assyrians.
²⁴ In that day Israel will be the third party with Egypt and Assyria,
 A blessing in the midst of the earth,
²⁵ whom the LORD of hosts has blessed, saying, 'Blessed is Egypt My people,
 And Assyria the work of My hands,
 And Israel My inheritance.'

^{20:1} In the year that the commander came to Ashdod, when Sargon the king of Assyria sent him and he fought against Ashdod and captured it, ² at that time the LORD spoke through Isaiah the son of Amoz, saying,
 'Go and loosen the sackcloth from your hips
 And take your shoes off your feet.'
 And he did so, going naked and barefoot.
³ And the LORD said,
 'Even as My servant Isaiah has gone naked and barefoot three years
 As a sign and token against Egypt and Cush,
⁴ So the king of Assyria will lead away the captives of Egypt
 And the exiles of Cush,
 Young and old,
 Naked and barefoot with buttocks uncovered, to the shame of Egypt.

Memphis: Another city in the Nile delta region.

B. Healing of Egypt

Egypt and Syria/Assyria became major centers of Christianity. The dominant 'schools' of Christian theology were in Alexandria, Egypt and Antioch, Syria. In the 4th century, Athanasius of Alexandria arose to become a great Christian theologian, and Ephrem the Syrian of Nisibis and Edessa was a great Christian theologian-poet. Another Christian center was Seleucia-Ctesiphon on the Tigris River.

A'. Smiting of Egypt Exemplified

Ashdod: The Canaanite people of Ashdod rebelled against Assyria in 713 BC. Assyria deposed the king of Ashdod and put another in his place. But Ashdod continued to rebel, with promises of Egyptian help, and called on Judah, Edom, and Moab to join the uprising. King Hezekiah of

⁵ Then they will be dismayed and ashamed
 Because of Cush their hope and Egypt their boast.
⁶ So the inhabitants of this coastland will say in that day,
 'Behold, such is our hope,
 Where we fled for help to be delivered from the king of Assyria;
 And we, how shall we escape?'

Judah stayed aloof, possibly because he listened to the advice of Isaiah the prophet. Assyria conquered Egypt in 671 BC.

Cush: An older name for Ethiopia, which also became a major center of Christianity.

Chart the reversal that God would bring about for Egyptians and Assyrians. Discuss the significance of this reversal.

Assyria Smiting Egypt (19:1 – 15)	God Healing Egypt (19:16 – 25)
The fear of the Lord (v.1)	
Confusion, disunity (v.2)	
Consulting the non-gods (v.3) A fierce king (v.4)	
The Nile dried in judgment (v.5 – 10)	
A spirit of bewilderment (v.11 – 15)	

Questions

1. A. The Smiting of Egypt Predicted: Isaiah 19:1 – 15
 - a. Check out how Egypt will be helpless in v.1 and 15.
 - b. What do you think about the apparent ‘civil war’ in v.2 – 4? Gather observations.
 - c. People will look to supernatural powers in v.3 and superpolitical powers in v.4. Why do we do this?
 - i. When economic collapse happens, people scapegoat each other. Egypt was a fairly diverse place. Some people were turned into scapegoats.
 - ii. Then people feel they need an authoritarian leader to protect them. Against other people they perceive as threats.
 - d. But notice that the political advisors will be idiots in conflict with each other, according to v.11 – 14. Does this sound familiar?
 - e. Application for reflection: When a wealthy empire collapses, why do people feel entitled to make it continue?
 - f. It’s likely that the cause of this is the Nile going dry (v.5 – 10). It’s possible that 19:1 – 15 is a chiasm, with v.5 – 10 in the center:
 1. Egypt helpless (v.1)
 2. Collapse of society, confusion (v.2 – 4)
 3. Collapse of the economy: The drying of the Nile River (v.5 – 10)
 - 2’. Collapse of leadership, confusion (v.11 – 14)
 - 1’. Egypt helpless (v.15)
 - g. Did God cause a drying up of the Nile River? Which caused all this chaos? Perhaps so. Or it could be a prediction of something that would happen soon.
 - i. What happens here seems to echo (replay) God’s plagues on Egypt back during the time of Moses, and even further back with Joseph and the seven years of plenty followed by seven years of famine. That is somewhat poetic given that Egypt was trying to retake Israel and influence them through their political and economic resources. God either dries up and dwindles the fundamental resources, or predicts that that will happen. He certainly can control natural phenomena.
 - ii. But recall: God did not and does not cause people to sin. God did not control nations, and does not now. How to explain God’s use/prediction of the movements of other nations? God placed the Israelites at the crossroads of Africa, Asia, and Europe, to be a light to them, and to represent the one true God. So what God did occasionally in a supernatural way, He did to protect Israel’s role as His partner to bring about Jesus.
 - h. Illus: My friend was a lifeguard at Huntington Beach, on the California coast of the Pacific Ocean. Once he saw a guy flailing his arms and panicking as he seemed to be sinking under the waves. So my friend got his lifesaver buoy and ran into the surf and swam over to the guy. But the guy was panicking. And panicking people will drag lifeguards under water. So my friend had to punch him so he’d stop struggling. The guy was momentarily dazed and shocked, but he grabbed the buoy. My friend saved his life. You have to cooperate in your own salvation and rescue! (e.g. Phil.2:12 – 13)
 - i. This was one aspect of why God closed off access to the tree of life. First of all, he wanted to prevent human beings from making their sin immortal, by eating in a corrupted state. He wanted to send Jesus before that, because he could undo death and heal the corruption in human nature.
 - ii. Secondly, God expected that the slow draining away of life, in the face of death, would remind human beings to turn to God, the source of life. Adam and Eve still had their vocations to bring forth garden life and human life. But it would be painful.
 - i. Application: Symbolically, let’s say that Israel collectively represents Jesus, and Egypt collectively represents you as a person, trying to resist and/or manipulate Jesus. What part of you is still opposed to Jesus? Have you realized yet that its energy and source is running out and running dry?
 - i. Living for your children becomes more emotionally lethal over time
 - ii. Money and success become less meaningful

- iii. Addictions become more costly over time because you require more and more for the same stimulation
 - iv. Relationships based on sex gets old as your body gets old
 - v. Anger and tantrums become more tiring
2. A'. The Smiting of Egypt Exemplified: Isaiah 20:1 – 6
- a. Later, God fulfilled His word. The king of Assyria, Sargon II, at the height of his power, sent his supreme commander to Ashdod, to reconquer it
 - b. Egypt was trying to influence from afar. You can also see how they were trying to manipulate people to their advantage. They were using their economic and political power. So it's poetic that God undoes their power.
 - c. Also, when Assyria comes against Israel, they will go further south and sack Egypt and a part of Ethiopia, too.
3. B. The Healing of Egypt: Isaiah 19:16 – 25
- a. How many times does the phrase, 'In that day' occur? In 19:16, 18, 19, 21, 24.
 - b. Why would 'that day' be so significant? Because God would do something in that day/age/era that turns enemies into friends and children.
 - c. Fill in the blanks of the table:

Assyria Smiting Egypt (19:1 – 15)	God Healing Egypt (19:16 – 25)
The fear of the Lord (v.1)	The fear of the Lord (v.16 – 17)
Confusion, disunity (v.2)	One language, one Lord (v.18) Reconciliation (v.19 – 22)
Consulting the non-gods (v.3) A fierce king (v.4)	Crying to the Lord (v.20) The healing Lord (v.22)
The Nile dried in judgment (v.5 – 10)	Highway for unity (v.23; cf. 11:15 – 16) Sharing with Israel in God's blessing (v.24 – 25)
A spirit of bewilderment (v.11 – 15)	Divine blessing

- d. What strikes you about this reversal?
 - i. The 'Savior and Champion' can only be Jesus!!
 - ii. Jesus calls us to die *with himself*, so he can kill 'the old self' (Rom.6:6) in us, and 'condemn sin' at its source – in us (Rom.8:3), and then raise us into resurrection life *with himself* (Rom.8:4 – 11). Jesus killed the thing in our human nature that was killing our relationship with God. He 'destroyed the dividing wall of hostility' in us, by doing it in himself, first (Eph.2:11 – 13), to bring forth 'a new humanity' (Eph.2:15).
 - iii. Abraham Lincoln said, 'The best way to destroy your enemy is to make him your friend.'
 - iv. Martin Luther King, Jr. said, 'Love is the only force capable of transforming an enemy into friend.' This is what God has done for us in Jesus! We were enemies of God (Rom.5:9 – 10), although God was not our enemy.
 - v. God loved the Assyrians and the Egyptians. Even though they were threatening Israel at this point, there would come a point when God would take all of the hostility of human beings onto Himself when He came in the person of His Son in Jesus of Nazareth. God actually did bring Assyrians and Egyptians into His kingdom, through Jesus. In fact, there were times when the Assyrian Church and the Egyptian Church were the strongest churches in the Christian community.
 - vi. Leader: Perhaps think of telling a story related to this – How has God made you, who were once opposed to Him, into a friend? Ask people to share something about that.
- e. Illus: Recently, God brought a convicted Middle Eastern terrorist to Jesus. This man was known by dozens of aliases, born in Kuwait, of Pakistani descent, and was one of the masterminds behind the 1993 World Trade Center bombing. He was arrested at an Al-Qaeda safe house in Islamabad, Pakistan in 1995 by special agents and was brought to the United States. During his trial in New York, Yousef stated, 'Yes, I am a terrorist, and proud of it as long as it is against the U.S. government.' He was sentenced to life in prison without parole. Ramzi Ahmed Yousef or Ramzi Mohammed Yousef (also transliterated as Ramzi Yusuf, Ramzi Youssef) (Arabic: رمزي يوسف),

birth name possibly Abdul Basit Mahmoud Abdul Karim (Arabic: عبد الباسط كريم) is a former terrorist now in the high-security Supermax prison ADX in Florence, Colorado. While in prison, however, he shaved his beard, stopped reading the Qur'an, and started to eat pork. He claims that he read the New Testament, became disenchanted with Islam after September 11, 2001, and accepted Jesus Christ. There are those who doubt his sincerity. But others have pointed out that he has nothing to gain. In fact, he shares the prison with other radical Islamic extremists like he once was. The stakes are high for him. I have followed his story every now and then for a few years now. From what I can tell, I think his turning to Jesus is real. And I share that with you to highlight the point made in Isaiah 19 – 20, that the way God vanquishes His enemies is by making them His friends. Even when we are faithless, God is faithful.