

## Isaiah Chapter 19, Hebrew Text with Translation and Footnotes

### Two Enigmatic Prophetic Messages:

One, a Prediction of Judgment and Hope for Egypt;

Another, a Prediction of Hope for the Uniting of Egypt, Assyria, and Israel  
as YHWH's People<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>There ten end-notes for **chapter 19**: (1) Instruction of Amenemope Compared to the Book of Proverbs; (2) Wikipedia Article on Tanis (Zoan); (3) The Ancient Egyptian City of Noph / Memphis; (4) The Ancient Egyptian City of Napata; (5) Quotations from Josephus Concerning Onias and Leontopolis; (6) The Conversion of Egypt According to the Sibylline Oracles; (7) Jewish Papyri and Temple at Elephantine Island on the Nile; (8) Leontopolis / Tell el Yehudiyyeh in Egypt; (9) The Seleucid Empire; (10) The Assyrian Empire.

Slotki entitles **chapter 19** "Oracle on Egypt."

He comments that "It is difficult to assign a definite date for the historical allusions, and the following three possible dates have been suggested: 720, 711 and 702 B.C.E..."

He states that **verses 1-15** contain "God's judgment on Egypt and the consequences of her religious, social, political and industrial conditions." (P. 87)

Alexander states that "This chapter admits of a well-defined division into two parts, one of which contains threatenings (**verses 1-17**), and the other promises (**verses 18-25**)..."

"The first part may again be sub-divided. In **verses 1-4**, the Egyptians are threatened with a penal visitation from Jehovah, with the downfall of their idols, with intestine commotions, with the disappointment of their superstitious hopes, and with subjection to hard masters. In **verses 5-10** they are threatened with physical calamities, the drying up of their streams, the decay of vegetation, the loss of their fisheries, and the destruction of their manufactures. In **verses 11-17**, the wisdom of their wise men is converted into folly, the courage of their brave men into cowardice, industry is universally suspended, and the people filled with dread of the anger of Jehovah..."

"The second part may be also subdivided. In **verses 18-21**, the Egyptians are described as acknowledging the true God, in consequence of what they had suffered at His hand, and the deliverance which He had granted them. In **verses 22-25**, the same cause is described as leading to an intimate union between Egypt, Assyria, and Israel, in the service of Jehovah, and the enjoyment of His favor..."

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“Calvin and J. D. Michaelis understand the chapter as a prophetic picture of the downfall of the old Egyptian empire, and of the subsequent conversion of its people...

“The most correct view of the matter seems to be as follows: The prophet, wishing to announce to the Jews the decline and fall of that great heathen power, in which they were so constantly disposed to trust (**Isaiah 30:1; 36:1**), describes the event under figures borrowed from the actual condition of Egypt...The prophet vividly portrays the fall of Egypt, by describing the waters of the Nile as failing, its meadows withering, its fisheries ceasing, and the peculiar manufactures of the country expiring, the proverbial wisdom of the nation changed to folly, its courage to cowardice, its strength to weakness...

“The first part is a metaphorical description of the downfall of the great Egyptian monarchy. So too the second part, the introduction of the true religion, and its effect as well on the internal state as on the international relations of the different countries, is expressed by figures drawn from the civil and religious institutions of the old economy...

“There is no abrupt transition, but a natural and intimate connection between the downfall of a heathen power and the growth of the true religion, and...nothing can be more arbitrary than the exposition of the first part as a literal, and of the other as a metaphorical prediction.” (Pp. 347-49)

And we wonder, How has Alexander determined that the materials in this chapter are largely “metaphorical”? We grant that metaphors are used—YHWH riding on a swift cloud, idols trembling, Egypt’s heart melting (**verse 1**); but the statements in **verses 2-17**, while using metaphor at the end (Egypt staggering in its vomit; the description of the people as “head and tail, palm branch or reed”), seems to be meant literally, as a prediction describing the downfall of the nation of Egypt—its internal divisions, its loss of spirit, the failure of its vaunted wisdom, its being given into the hand of a hard master and fierce king; the drying up of the Nile and the industries dependent upon it; the failure of Egypt’s leadership.

Do you agree that all of this is “metaphorical”? We do not. And we wonder if Alexander takes this view in order to avoid the conclusion that the prophecy was not fulfilled—certainly not all of it—and makes it instead only a metaphor of Egypt’s gradual conversion to Christianity through peaceful means. What do you think?

Reread the passage. Does this passage appear to be describing the gradual conversion of Egypt to Christianity through peaceful means?

Gray entitles **chapter 19** The Oracle of Egypt.”

He comments that “The chapter consists of (a) a poem or poetical fragments, **verses 1-14** or **15**; (b) a prose section, **verses 16-25**...

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“The poem conceives Yahweh as about to visit Egypt in Person, and to punish it by bringing about civil war, the dominion of a ‘hard lord,’ and the complete destruction of the entire country by the drying up of the Nile. **Verses 16-17** also speak of a plan of Yahweh to punish Egypt, terrifying them by means of Judah. But **verses 18-25** are in an entirely different tone. Here the expectation is that Egypt and (though this point comes out rather allusively) Assyria also will be converted to Yahweh...

“Probably the original oracle extended down to **verse 14** or **15** only; the remainder of the chapter, like **chapters 18** and **20**, were subsequently added to this ‘oracle’ as dealing also with the Nile valley.” (P. 318)

Oswalt entitles **19:1-20:6** “Judgment On Egypt.”

He entitles **19:1-24** “Egypt has nothing to offer.”

He entitles **19:1-15** “Egypt’s might confounded.”

And we wonder how or why Oswalt has completely omitted any mention of hope for Egypt in the titles. We would change his first title to “Judgment and Salvation for Egypt.”

Oswalt comments that “**Chapters 19-20** give us God’s word against Egypt [but that is far too broad a statement—since there is a very positive message concerning Egypt as coming to know YHWH in **19:18-22**, and YHWH’s calling Egypt ‘My people,’ in **19:25!**]...

“As is evident from **chapters 30** and **31**, the leaders of Judah were tempted to rely more and more upon Egypt as the eighth century [800 to 701 B.C.E.] drew toward a close and as Assyria’s threat loomed larger and larger. Isaiah’s word was the same as it had been concerning Assyria earlier: whatever we trust in place of God will eventually turn on us and destroy us. Why trust Egypt, he asks, when Egypt has nothing to offer you that you do not already have (**chapter 19**)?”

[We say, both Egypt and Assyria have much to offer—including the possibility of their becoming united with Israel—in an amazing new relationship which Israel did not have in the past, and didn’t have at the time this prophetic message was given, but as **19:23-25** predicts it will one day have!] Why trust Egypt when recent history shows she will betray you (**chapter 20**)? Why not trust the God Who holds Egypt in the palm of His hand and to whom Egypt must one day turn? [Neither of these questions is raised in the text of **chapter 19**—they are Oswalt’s mantra of interpretation in these chapters.]

“In the two chapters three segments can be identified: **19:1-15** tells of Egypt’s utter helplessness before God; **19:16-25** tells that Egypt will one day be a worshiper of God [Oswalt says nothing about both Egypt and Assyria becoming equal

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with Israel!]; **20:1-6** gives a vivid and concrete example of the lack of wisdom in trusting Egypt.” (P. 366)

Oswalt comments on **19:1-15** that “In this poem of three nearly equal strophes God successively exposes the weakness of all that would supposedly make Egypt great: her religion (**verses 1-4**), her physical situation (**verses 5-10**), her vaunted wisdom (**verses 11-15**). None of these is ultimate, so what ground remains for committing Judah’s national destiny to Egypt? [But note that this is Oswalt’s question; it is not a question raised in this passage.]

“The occasion and authorship of this segment are matters of debate. Skinner says that similarities with known Isaianic passages prove it to be Isaiah’s, while Kaiser says that these similarities coupled with ‘poor’ poetry show that a later imitator of Isaiah wrote it. Similarly, attempts to date it by references to the ‘hard ruler’ of **verse 4** have extended from the Ethiopian Piankhy of 715 B.C.E. to Antiochus Epiphanes in 170 B.C.E...

“However, attempts to locate the poem in a specific historical context seem likely to be futile. Alexander is surely right when he says that the picture is metaphorical, as one would speak in a metaphorical way of Britain’s demise by saying that her navy is sunk, her universities are empty, her throne abandoned, without any of those things being literally true. Thus it seems impossible to prove or disprove Isaianic authorship from the internal evidence.” (P. 366)

But as we have said concerning Alexander’s view of the prophetic prediction as ‘metaphorical,’ while there are metaphorical elements in the description, they are easily discernible. But the passage as a whole is a prediction of what is going to happen to Egypt, in what seem to be very literal, non-metaphorical statements.

The fact is that the predictions did not happen as far as we know. But that doesn’t mean that they were only intended as metaphorical statements—and we think the claim that they are metaphorical is an attempt to avoid the fact that the predictions failed to be fulfilled.

Motyer entitles **19:1-20:6** “Egypt—one God, one world, one people.”

He comments that “The coherent sequence of the oracles continues. Following on the vision of a remnant of both Gentiles and Israel drawn to the Lord in Zion (**chapters 17 and 18**), it remains to be asked on what terms the Gentiles come in. Will it really be with co-equal glory, as **17:3** forecast? To answer this question Isaiah picks the unlikeliest candidate, Egypt, the first and most memorable adversary of the Lord’s people. At the climax of the oracle (**19:23-25**) he links Egypt with Assyria, the contemporary oppressor. If these two can be [brought] into co-equality with Israel then the world will be one indeed!...

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“With the disappearance of the northern states, Aram and Israel, into the maw of Assyria, the political center of gravity in western Palestine moved south and, at least from 715 B.C.E. onwards, Egypt was behind every anti-Assyrian movement. An alliance with Egypt as the means of throwing off the Assyrian yoke and recovering national sovereignty was a constant temptation to the politically ambitious rulers of Judah (see **chapters 28-31** and **36-37**). Isaiah resolutely opposed this, seeing in Egypt no help but only disaster (compare **30:6-7**)...

“Consequently the burden of **19:1-15** is an attempt to dissuade them from having any truck with Egypt [but where is anything said in the text concerning ‘not having any truck with Egypt’? If this is ‘the burden’ of this passage, why is it not mentioned?], based on an exposure of existing and coming disruption in Egyptian affairs, of economic collapse (such as would make aid unlikely if not impossible) and of political obtuseness besetting Egyptian counselors. There is nothing here that could not have been said by Isaiah at any time in the last fifteen years of the eighth century, and the perpetually interfering spirit of Egypt would have afforded him ample opportunity to speak out.” (Pp. 163-64)

Motyer entitles **19:1-15** “The smiting of Egypt predicted.”

He comments that “The abiding message of a passage such as this lies not in its details, which are peculiar to its situation and date, but in its insistence that the problems of society, economics and politics, have a spiritual causation. They are the outworking of Divine purposes and are directly traceable to the hand of God, not the outworking of sociological laws, market forces or political fortunes. And it is only by recourse to the Lord that they can be solved.” (P. 164)

In this way, Motyer dismisses the details, which he says have nothing to do with its ‘abiding message.’ But in terms of historical fulfillment, the details of the passage were not fulfilled, especially when the entire chapter is considered. That is no problem when we consider the prophetic message in the light of **Numbers 12:6-8** and **1 Corinthians 13:9-12**, where we are taught that the prophetic message comes through dreams and visions, that are enigmatic, puzzling, not “face-to-face” communication, such as Moses had with YHWH. When Paul states that he saw “through a mirror darkly,” we quit assuming that he was able to foresee the future accurately; the same thing applies to Isaiah’s visions of the future. That those visions are filled with hope is obvious—but that they are accurate, detailed maps of the future is not to be expected!

Watts entitles **verses 1-17** “Yahweh against Egypt.”

He comments that “The chapter consists of a vision of Yahweh’s intervention in Egypt (**verses 1-15**) that reverses His stance in **18:4** and foresees the fine results which could develop from that move (**verses 16-25**).

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“The vision portrays:

- (1) Yahweh’s approach and Egyptian dismay (**verse 1**);
- (2) Yahweh’s speech (**verses 2-4**) announcing internal conflict and deliverance to a fierce king, the Ethiopian Sabaka [the text does not identify the fierce king];
- (3) a drought that brings economic disaster (**verses 5-10**);
- (4) a taunt against the counselors of Pharaoh (**verses 11-15**).

“The results are pictured with five ‘in that day’ announcements:

- (1) Judah will terrorize the Egyptians (**verses 16-17**);
- (2) five cities will speak a Canaanite language (**verse 18**);
- (3) an altar to Yahweh will be set up in Egypt; Egyptians will worship Yahweh and He will respond to them (**verses 19-22**);
- (4) a highway between Egypt and Assyria; they will cooperate even in worship (**verse 23**);
- (5) Israel, Egypt, and Assyria under Yahweh’s rule (**verses 24-25**).” (P. 252)

And we ask, if this is in fact what the vision portrays, why entitle it “Yahweh against Egypt”? The outcome envisioned sounds much more like “Yahweh for Egypt”!

Kaiser states concerning **verses 1-15**, “This prophecy against Egypt, to which five additions were later made (**verses 16-25**) was not composed by Isaiah...It is the work of a devout writer who drew all his ideas from the [**Book of Isaiah**]...”

“The first stanza announces the collapse of the religious and civil order of the country, the second describes the destruction of its economic basis and the third the helplessness of the king and his officials in the face of the disasters that are sweeping over them.

“The very general nature of the political allusions makes it difficult to date the prophecy with any certainty...Its real significance lies not in its scanty historical content, but in the insight which it gives us into the faith and thought of Jew who did not allow the political impotence of his people to shake his belief that Yahweh remained the Lord of the nations and the Guide of their fate.” (Pp. 99-100)

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While Kaiser says it is difficult to date the prophecy with any certainty, that does not deter him from dating it in the late post-exilic era when there was no more “Assyria,” and long after the career of the historical Isaiah.

<sup>2</sup>Gray entitles **verses 1-4** “Civil War and the ‘hard lord.’”

He comments that “The writer appears to have certain definite historical circumstances in view. He is doubtless predicting, yet he appears to live at a time when there had already ceased to be any effective central government in Egypt, but when...some soldier or monarch had already made a name for himself, and seemed likely to make Egypt subject to him [but this is a prophecy of the future, not a survey of current conditions!]...The ‘hard lord’ of **verse 4** must remain a matter of guesswork.” (P. 320)

Gray mentions that among the guesses that have been made are: the Ethiopian Piankhi, or Tirhakah, or one of the Assyrian kings—whether Sargon, or Sennacherib. Many have guessed Psammetichus I (663-609 B.C.E.)—see Herodotus, **Histories**, II, pp. 151-57. Others have guessed Cambyses, or Artaxerxes Ochus, or even Antiochus Epiphanes. (P. 321)

Oswalt states that “According to most commentators, **19:1-4** deals with fratricidal warfare taking place in Egypt with total political collapse preceding foreign conquest. Undoubtedly this theme is present. Yet, one wonders if this is the central theme or if it is in fact derivative...

“In the entire poem, the only references to Egypt’s religion come in this strophe, in **verses 1** and **3**. Is it not possible that the author is laying the blame for the internecine struggle at the foot of Egypt’s lush polytheism? It is because she has no one God, like Yahweh, to unite her and because her Gods are basically ineffectual and must scabble for power, the prophet seems to be saying, that Egypt is doomed to disintegration and foreign domination. Why should Judah be attracted to that?” (Pp. 366-67)

To Oswalt, this is what the prophet “seems to be saying,” but in fact it is not what he says in this passage. It does not compare Egypt’s religion with Israel’s. It predicts a terrifying future that awaits Egypt as YHWH comes swiftly on a cloud, exposing the weakness of Egypt and her religion, bringing about civil war, ending in Egypt’s being handed over to a hard ruler and a fierce king who will rule over her.

And Oswalt’s question, which he asks over and over in his commentary on **chapters 13-23**, is his question—but it is not a question heard on the lips of the prophet, or read in the words written by his pen in this chapter. What do you think?

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Alexander translates / comments on **verse 1**: “*The Burden of Egypt. Behold! Jehovah riding on a light cloud, and he comes to (or into) Egypt, and the idols of Egypt move at His presence, and the heart of Egypt melts within him. This verse describes God as the Author of the judgments afterwards detailed.*” (P. 349)

Oswalt states that the phrase, “*the Lord is riding on a swift cloud* expresses God’s sovereignty over nature and suggest at the outset that the theme of this strophe is fundamentally a religious one.” (P. 367)

But YHWH’s riding on a swift cloud is, as Alexander says, the depiction of YHWH’s soon-coming judgment, and not an affirmation of “sovereignty over nature.”

There will be passages in **Isaiah** that affirm YHWH’s universal sovereignty loudly and clearly—for example, in **Isaiah 40:9-31**—but that is not the theme here. There will likewise be passages in **Isaiah** that take up the theme of the contrast between YHWH and the idols—for example, in **Isaiah 44:8-20**—but that is not the theme here.

Here the theme is YHWH’s coming in swift judgment on Egypt, which causes Egypt’s Gods to tremble—but it is a judgment which, as the closing section of **chapter 19** will show, is that of a God Who longs for Egypt’s conversion and acceptance into His kingdom that includes Egypt and Assyria side by side with Israel.

We think Oswalt is “jumping the gun,” and introducing theological ideas that, while true, are not dealt with in this chapter.

Kaiser entitles **verses 1-4** “The collapse of the civil order.”

He comments that “Drawing upon an ancient conception, rooted in Canaanite mythology, of the passing by of the God on His chariot of clouds...the prophet foretells the coming of Yahweh to Egypt...The judgment upon the Gods of Egypt once carried out at the exodus and later foretold by the prophets will be exercised upon them. As a result the Egyptians will lose their courage and power of decision.” (P. 100)

But is anything said in this passage about “judgment upon the Gods of Egypt”? They are called “nothings,” and are said to tremble at His coming, but nothing further. And is there reference made to the exodus in this passage? We think Kaiser is reading these ideas into the text.

Motyer entitles **verse 1** “Introduction,” and states that “The first move of the Lord in judgment is to weaken national morale: religion ceases to move and help and there is a loss of vitality and a spirit of defeatism.” (P. 164)

Motyer holds that YHWH riding on a swift cloud means “the Lord is swift to come to the aid of His people.” (P. 164) But there is nothing in the text about YHWH coming

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הִנֵּה יְהוָה רֹכֵב עַל-עַב קָלָ

וּבָא מִצְרַיִם

וְנָעוּ אֱלֹהֵי מִצְרַיִם מִפְּנֵיו

וּלְבַב מִצְרַיִם יִמַּס בְּקִרְבּוֹ:

Utterance / oracle of Egypt:

Look–YHWH (is) riding upon a swift cloud,<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>(...continued)

to the aid of His people—the depiction of the text is that of YHWH coming in swift judgment upon Egypt. The result of that Divine judgment on Egypt is that Egypt is drawn into the knowledge and worship of YHWH, which then results in their becoming one with both Israel and Assyria in the worship of YHWH.

<sup>3</sup>Slotki states that the “swift cloud” symbolizes “speedy fulfillment of the judgment. The imagery is derived from an ancient conception that God reveals Himself in a thunderstorm.” (Pp. 87-88)

Alexander states that “The act of riding on a light cloud implies that He comes from heaven, and that He comes swiftly.” (P. 349) Do you agree? We agree with the swiftness, but doubt that riding on a light or swift cloud means coming from heaven.

Gray states that the depiction of Yahweh riding through heaven on a cloud-chariot should be compared to:

**Deuteronomy 33:26,**

There is none like the El / God of Yeshurun--  
riding heavens with your help,  
and clouds in His majesty!

**Psalms 18:10-11<sup>Heb</sup> / 9-10<sup>Eng</sup>,**

10/9 And He extended / inclined [the] heavens, and He descended;  
and a heavy cloud beneath His feet.

11/10 And He rode upon a cherub / winged creature, and He flew;  
and He flew swiftly upon the wings of wind!

**Psalms 68:34<sup>Heb</sup> / 33<sup>Eng</sup>,** where the psalmist urges the hearers to sing,

to the One Riding in heavens, heavens of (the) east / former (times)!  
Look–He will give / gives a sound with His voice, a voice of strength!

(continued...)

and coming to Egypt;

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<sup>3</sup>(...continued)

**Psalm 104:3**, where YHWH is described as:

The One Who lays beams of his upper rooms in the waters;  
the One Who places clouds (for) His chariot;  
the One Who walks upon wind-clouds;

### **Ezekiel, chapters 1 and 10**

The vision of the four living creatures and its culmination in the Glory of YHWH is extremely puzzling and enigmatic, just as we would expect in all prophetic visions. But here it is a "vision of the invisible," an attempt to describe in human language a Divine reality that far surpasses the ability of human language to describe accurately. The Divine presence is real--far more real than human descriptions are able to portray. But any human portrayal is of necessity highly symbolical in nature, and leaves the reader or viewer with a sense of trembling, puzzled awe before a tremendous mystery that far exceeds any human apprehension!

The Glory of YHWH comes "with a great cloud" (**Ezekiel 1:4**). The four living creatures that emerge from the cloud have a four-fold symbolism, representing all of creation--they represent humanity (ordained by God to be rulers over all of creation), the wild beasts (over which the lion is "king"), domesticated animals (of which the ox is perhaps the strongest), and the birds (one of the mightiest representatives is the **neshar**, the huge vulture that soars through the clouds).

Over and above this awesome, mysterious reality, that moves on wheels filled with eyes [in fertility religions, the wheels are filled with humans and animals engaged in sexual intercourse--see **Wikipedia**, "Khajuraho Group of Monuments"], is the sound "like the roar of rushing waters, like the voice of Shaddai [an ancient name for YHWH or God, which probably means "My Breast," or "The One Who Is Sufficient"], like the tumult of an army; above all of that Ezekiel sees a throne of precious stones, and high above on the throne "a figure like that of a human being."

Ezekiel's language is highly guarded and careful, using the words "likeness" and "like" over and over, letting the reader know that anything he has seen is only an approximation, not in any way a literal, word-for-word photographic description of the Divine reality.

**Ezekiel 11:22-23**, the prophet's vision of the Divine chariot leaving Jerusalem, and departing into Babylon

Gray comments that By reason of Yahweh's presence (**Isaiah 7:2; 64:1**), the idols (**Isaiah 2:8**) will tremble...with fear, and the heart of Egypt--the people personified (**Isaiah 1:5**)--will melt (**Isaiah 13:7**), i.e. their courage will vanish (compare **Deuteronomy 20:8; 2 Samuel 17:10**).” (P. 323)

and Egypt's (worthless) idols<sup>4</sup> will totter / tremble from before Him,<sup>5</sup>

and Egypt's heart will melt in His presence.<sup>6</sup>

19:27 וְסִכְסְכְּתֵי מִצְרַיִם בְּמִצְרַיִם

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<sup>4</sup>The noun here is אֱלִילִים, in the construct plural. The noun means “weak, feeble, poor things,” or as Watts defines it, “worthless things, idols.” **Rahifs** translates by τὰ χειροποίητα, “the handmade things.” The Latin Vulgate has *simulacra*, “images,” “representations.”

<sup>5</sup>Slotki's translation has “And the idols of Egypt shall be moved at His presence,” and he comments that “This signifies the collapse of the Egyptian religion.” (P. 88) We say, not “collapse,” but impotence, inability to act.

The text depicts the “nothing Gods” of Egypt trembling at the presence of YHWH in their land, but says nothing at this point concerning the collapse of the Egyptian religion. Later, in **verses 18-25**, the prediction is given that the Egyptians will turn to YHWH in both prayer and worship, and that will mean their abandonment of their former Gods, in view of the power of YHWH, and the impotence of their idols.

<sup>6</sup>Slotki comments that this “melting of heart” indicates “loss of self-confidence.” (P. 88)

Oswalt comments that “Before the presence of the One Who is God, Egypt's many faceted idols are in fact nonentities [referring to the plural אֱלִילִים—‘insufficient,’ ‘worthless beings’; translated by **Rahifs** as χειροποίητα, ‘hand-made things’]...

“They were shown to be this in the exodus when the Lord had proven His complete superiority over them (**Exodus 12:12**), so their quivering before Him is only to be expected. Before the revealed truth of one transcendent God Who cannot be manipulated, but Whose faithful love can be trusted to the end, the complex polytheisms of human religion pale into nothing.” (P. 367)

Yes, but while our text mentions the trembling of the idols, it does not draw all of these theological conclusions that Oswalt does.

Watts says to compare **Isaiah 7:2**, “where similar language speaks of Judah's lack of moral strength before Aram and Syria and urges the king not to weaken in his resolve. The words and ideas come from the formal language of Holy War (compare **Deuteronomy 20:3**). They imply that collapse of morale ensures victory [for the one conquering].” (P. 253) We say, collapse of morale ensures defeat in any conflict.

<sup>7</sup>Slotki comments on **verses 2-4**, that “God speaks.” (P. 88)

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Kaiser likewise states that “In **verse 2** Yahweh begins to explain why He is setting out against Egypt, and His words continue until **verse 4b**. He ‘spurs’ the Egyptians against each other so much (compare **Isaiah 9:10<sup>Heb</sup> / 11<sup>Eng</sup>**) that all order collapses as everyone struggles against everyone else.” (P. 100)

Motyer entitles **verses 2-4** “Social collapse.” He comments that “As national spirit collapses (**verse 1**) Divine action provokes social division; (**verse 2**), frustration sets in (**verse 3a**) and nothing goes according to plan (**verse 3b**). There is declension [a condition of decline or moral deterioration] into religious quackery (**verse 3c**) and the country falls under dictatorship (**verse 4**).” (P. 164)

He comments on **verse 2** that “The original division into the kingdoms of Upper and Lower Egypt will reappear [the text does not mention Upper and Lower Egypt]. Thus the picture is complete: individual against individual, city against city, north against south.” (P. 164) The text may mean nome against nome, and there were many more nomes than just north and south—see Oswalt’s comment below.

Alexander translates **verse 2**: “And I will excite Egypt against Egypt, and they shall fight, a man with his brother, and a man with his fellow, city with city, kingdom with kingdom.” He comments that “*Egypt against Egypt*...involves an allusion to the internal divisions of the kingdom, or rather the existence of contemporary kingdoms.” (P. 38)

Oswalt comments that the phrase *I will spur Egypt against Egypt* “is a graphic way of expressing the inner discord which comes to a people who have no stay beyond themselves in this world. Throughout her history Egypt was especially prone to this kind of dissolution. After the six strong dynasties of the Old Kingdom (3000-2200 B.C.E.), there came a two-hundred-year period when each of the 42 nomes (city-states) became a country unto itself and general chaos reigned. Then the Twelfth Dynasty united the land for about two hundred years (1990-1785 B.C.E.), but again chaos took over for two centuries...The fact that each nome had its own God certainly led to fratricide when there was no God-King to enforce national order. So Isaiah sees more of this kind of disaster ahead for Egypt.” (Pp. 367-68)

This is a somewhat one-sided comment, as Oswalt surveys the history of ancient Egypt. He sees some 400 years of division and disunity, but indicates that close to 2000 years of unity were experienced by the ancient Egyptians with their multitude of Deities—yet he concludes that those Gods were unable to provide unity to the nation.

We suspect that there was much more going on in Egyptian history than just their religion that was responsible for her problems—for example, internal political divisions between pharaohs and powerful rulers of nomes, “nomarchs,” along with failures in the annual flooding of the Nile, invasions by foreigners such as the Hyskos and “Sea People”, and later both the Assyrians and Persians--that led to either unity or division and disunity. And we wonder, do historians of Egypt draw these same overall

(continued...)

וְנִלְחַמוּ אִישׁ-בְּאָחִיו וְאִישׁ בְּרֵעֵהוּ

עִיר בְּעִיר מִמְּלָכָה בְּמִמְלָכָה:

And I will spur on<sup>8</sup> Egyptians against Egyptians,  
and they will fight each one with his brother,  
and each one with his neighbor,  
a city<sup>9</sup> against a city,

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<sup>7</sup>(...continued)

conclusions that Oswalt does concerning religion as the dominant cause for fratricide and division in Egypt? We think not, but quickly state that we are amateurs in our understanding of Egyptian history.

We are largely dependent today on **Wikipedia** with its many articles on Egypt and its history. For one example, consider this statement: “The historical records of ancient Egypt begin with Egypt as a unified state, which occurred sometime around 3150 B.C.E. According to Egyptian tradition, Menes, thought to have unified Upper and Lower Egypt, was the first king. This Egyptian culture, customs, art expression, architecture, and social structure was closely tied to religion, remarkably stable, and changed little over a period of nearly 3000 years.” (**Wikipedia**, 9/10/2016)

This statement does not indicate Egypt’s religion as a source of division and fratricide, but rather as a unifying force in Egyptian history.

What we can affirm with certainty is that Isaiah, a prophet of YHWH in Israel, predicted YHWH’s judgment coming on Egypt, leading to devastating consequences, but ultimately causing Egypt to turn to Him, crying out in her need, and then being heard and healed by YHWH, and coming to know and worship Him—a prediction that to our knowledge has never come to fulfillment in its entirety, even though there have been many times in history when civil war has arisen in Egypt.

<sup>8</sup>The phrase וְסָכַסְכְּתִי is said by **Brown-Driver-Briggs** to be a pilpel verb from the root שָׁכַךְ, which means “to prick or spur on,” with the *sin* being changed to *samekh*. Others derive the verb from סָוַךְ, perhaps meaning “to prick,” or “to needle.”

<sup>9</sup>1QIs<sup>a</sup> interpolates the conjunction “and” before “city.” However the ancient versions agree with the Hebrew text in not having the conjunction.

a kingdom against a kingdom.<sup>10</sup>

19:3<sup>11</sup> וְנִבְקָה רֵיחַ-מִצְרַיִם בְּקִרְבּוֹ

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<sup>10</sup>Slotki states that these lines mean “Political chaos will undermine the national stability.” (P. 88)

Alexander states that “The last words [kingdom with kingdom] are rendered in [Rahlf’s] νομὸς ἐπὶ νομόν, meaning no doubt the thirty-six *nomes* or provinces of ancient Egypt.” (P. 349)

Gray likewise comments that “The ‘kingdoms’ are the *nomes* of Egypt. The form of the prophecy in this verse would be best accounted for if it was written in a period when there was no effective central government and no strong Pharaoh (**verse 11**) able to control the monarchs...

“Such a period was that which preceded the establishment of the Ethiopian dynasty, about 712 B.C.E...; another such followed the fall of the same dynasty...So, too, the period between 404 B.C.E., when the Egyptians recovered their independence of the Persians, and 342 B.C.E. [when Egypt] was filled with internal discord.” (P. 323)

But the passage is a prophetic prediction of a time to come, and the time to come does not necessarily reflect the time at which the passage was written. Some commentators quietly assume that whatever is being prophesied reflects current conditions at the time of the prophecy. But we think this assumption is unwarranted. What do you think?

Watts states that the words “*city against city, kingdom against kingdom* are apt description of the situation in Egypt of the twenty-fifth Dynasty. Breasted (**History of Egypt**, p. 536) wrote ‘The power of the dominant house rapidly waned until there was at last an independent lord or petty king in every city of the Delta and up the river as far as Hermopolis. We are acquainted with the names of eighteen of those dynasties, whose struggles among themselves now led to the total dissolution of the Egyptian state.’” (P. 253)

Yes...but the rest of the chapter did not happen at that time, or at any subsequent time, especially with reference to the conversion of Egypt to YHWH and their uniting with Israel and Assyria in the worship of YHWH!

So what do you think? Does it ring true to you to depict the prophecy as having been fulfilled in Egyptian history, but only partially—never fully? Does this not lead to the conclusion that the prophecy has not been fulfilled?

<sup>11</sup>Alexander translates / comments on **verse 3**: “*And the spirit of Egypt shall be emptied out (or exhausted) in the midst thereof, and the counsel (or sagacity) thereof I will swallow up (annihilate or render useless); and they will seek to the idols, and to the mutterers, and to the familiar spirits, and to the wizards.*” (P. 350)

(continued...)

<sup>11</sup>(...continued)

Gray comments on **verse 3**: “Timorous [nervous, fearful, lacking confidence] in **verse 1**, fratricidally [in a murderous manner] courageous, or at least pugnacious [quick to quarrel, fight], in **verse 2**, the Egyptians are now pictured as witless and perplexed.

Motyer comments on **verse 3**, “*The Egyptians will lose heart* / ‘the spirit of Egypt will be devastated,’ i.e. go into shock...This loss of nerve will be fed by Divine action frustrating every proposal for national recovery...As ever in such a time, cults will thrive with their futile ‘seeking’ (see **Isaiah 8:19**) of those that are ‘no-Gods’ and pathetic trust in the dead (אֲטִיָּוָה [Brown-Driver-Briggs defines by ‘mutterers’] is found only here—in cognate languages it means ‘ghosts’).” (Pp. 164-65) In fact, **Holladay** says the noun means “ghosts.” But as we have noted oftentimes, when a word occurs only once in the **Hebrew Bible**, it is very difficult to determine its meaning.

Watts comments that “Internal chaos leads to Egypt’s impotence as it had to Judah’s (compare **chapter 3**). God turns them over to a strong tyrant ruler [**verse 4**] from outside the realm [but where does the text mention ‘from outside the realm’?]. For Judah this was Assyria (**Isaiah 7:17**). For Egypt it is Ethiopia’s new ruler, Shabaka. Their panic leads them to useless necromancy (compare **Isaiah 8:19-22**).” (P. 253)

“Neferkare Shabaka (or Shabako) was a Kushite pharaoh of the Twenty-fifth dynasty of Egypt, who reigned from 721–707 / 706 B.C.E...Shabaka's reign is significant because he consolidated the Nubian Kingdom's control over all of Egypt from Nubia down to the Delta region. It also saw an enormous amount of building work undertaken throughout Egypt, especially at the city of Thebes, which he made the capital of his kingdom. In Karnak he erected a pink granite statue of himself wearing the twin crowns of Egypt. Shabaka succeeded in preserving Egypt's independence from outside foreign powers--especially the Assyrian empire under Sargon II.” (Wikipedia, 9/15/2016)

We respond to Watts’ comment: Perhaps--but the text makes no mention of Shabaka, and this is only Watts’ guess concerning the fulfilment of the prediction in **Isaiah 19**. One thing for sure is that the other things predicted concerning Egypt’s future did not happen in the reign of Shabaka, and we wonder if Shabaka would be called “a tyrant from outside the realm,” since he was a native of Upper Egypt. See Watts further statements in **verse 4**, footnote 20.

Kaiser comments on **verse 3** that “There is no way out of this situation for the Egyptians, since their ‘spirit,’ the vital force given to men by God, and regarded like the heart...is thrown into confusion, and their ability to make and carry out clear decisions is paralyzed by Yahweh. In short, His presence deprives the Egyptians of their reason. The general helplessness is reflected in [their] questioning of idols and mediums [as reliable sources for guidance].” (P. 101)

וְדַרְשׁוּ אֶל-הָאֱלִילִים וְאֶל-הָאֲשִׁים  
וְאֶל-הָאֲבוֹת וְאֶל-הַיְדֻעֵנִים:

And the spirit<sup>12</sup> of Egypt will be emptied out<sup>13</sup> in its midst;

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<sup>12</sup>Alexander states that by “spirit” we are “not to understand courage but intellect.” (P. 350) But we ask, how does he know this?

Gray likewise states that the phrase, *the spirit within him shall be emptied out*, “means the Egyptians will lose their wits; compare the parallel line.” (P. 324)

Perhaps...but we are not sure. Is it “intellect,” or “wits”? Why not “courage”?

The Hebrew רוּחַ, which can mean “spirit,” “Spirit,” “wind,” “breath,” is translated by **Rahfs** with the definite article, τὸ πνεῦμα, which can mean “wind,” “breath,” “spirit,” and “Spirit.”

To say that it means “courage” or “intellect” or “wits” is only a guess; it could just as well mean “feeling” or “will,” or “very self,” or “ego.” When such “multivalent” words are used in statements—words that have or are susceptible to many applications, interpretations or meanings—it is not wise to attempt to limit it to one interpretation or meaning. We think it is best to say “the innermost being of the Egyptians will be emptied out / exhausted,” and as a result the nation will be discouraged, depressed—it will have “lost its spirit.”

**New International** translates by “The Egyptians will lose heart.”

**Rahfs** has καὶ παραχθήσεται τὸ πνεῦμα τῶν Αἰγυπτίων ἐν αὐτοῖς, “and the spirit of the Egyptians will be troubled within them.”

Oswalt explains that “When a people begin to lose their way, especially a normally complacent and self-confident people like the Egyptians [we ask, where has Oswalt obtained such a generalized psychological description of the ancient Egyptians?], depression settles on them suddenly. They will be despondent, lacking in spirit...”

“Egyptian religion, especially during the Middle Kingdom (1190-1785 B.C.E.) and the New Kingdom (1550-1221 B.C.E.), exhibited a number of universalistic and monolatrous trends. But after this time the ancient polytheisms and spiritist tendencies began to reassert themselves. That is the picture here...”

“As the more intellectualized and conceptualized polytheisms break down under the stress of the times, the more magical, subliminal spiritism reasserts itself. This situation is not restricted to polytheistic lands. It can also happen to a land where a paganized, manipulative Yahwism is practiced (**Isaiah 8:19-22**). Only a robust, pure

(continued...)



and his counsel / plan I will swallow up.<sup>14</sup>

And they will seek to the nothing-Gods<sup>15</sup> and to the mutterers,<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>(...continued)

faith in the God of the **Bible** can stand the shocks which must eventually come to every person and nation.” (P. 368)

In this way, Oswalt, instead of commenting on the text, launches into discussions of things far beyond his area of expertise, along with dogmatic statements concerning modern religion. Those who come to his commentary wanting enlightenment on the meaning of the text will find comments such as this distracting, and of little help in understanding the text. We find his commentary very valuable when Oswalt sticks to the text, and avoids generalizing theological statements.

<sup>13</sup>Watts notes that the phrase וּנְבִקָה “is niphal perfect, 3<sup>rd</sup> feminine singular from נִבְקָה,” (p. 250) and preceded by the waw-conversive means “and she / it will be empty,” “she / it will be poured out.” **Rahlf**s has καὶ παραχθήσεται, “and she / it will be troubled.” The noun נִיָּה is feminine.

<sup>14</sup>Slotki’s translation of this line is “And I will make void the counsel thereof.” He comments that “Losing the power of logical reasoning, the Egyptians have recourse to sorcery and witchcraft.” (P. 88)

But for Isaiah, “logical reasoning” is not the answer—rather, it is faith in YHWH, and listening to voice of YHWH’s prophets—which is similar to the Egyptians’ turning to sorcery and witchcraft, and listening to their voice.

And so it is today—when we exhaust our logical reasoning, and find ourselves bankrupt, with no valid answers, we too turn to some other source, religious or semi-religious, such as fortune-tellers or mystics. The only question is, Is there really a God Whom we can pray to, Who will hear our prayers? Isaiah’s answer is that indeed there is—it is YHWH, the God of Israel, but also the God of all the earth, of all humanity. And His word, while enigmatic and puzzling, can be heard by paying close attention to His servants, the prophets, and by “seeking His face” in humble, honest dialogue. Compare **Isaiah 1:18**.

Do you agree? Why? Why not?

<sup>15</sup>The common Hebrew word for “the God” is הָאֱלֹהִים the word used here is הָאֱלִילִים, “the weak / feeble / poor ones.” The nouns look very similar, but are exact

(continued...)

and to the communicators with the dead<sup>17</sup> and to the familiar spirits.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>(...continued)

opposites. **Rahlf**s translates by τοὺς θεοὺς αὐτῶν, “the Gods of theirs,” evidently reading a Hebrew text with **הַאֱלֹהֵיהֶם**.

<sup>16</sup>The plural noun **הַאֲטִיִּים** means “the mutterers,” and is parallel to **יְדַעְנִים**, “familiar spirits,” “knowing ones,” and **אֲבוֹת**, “those who seek to communicate with the dead.”

**Brown-Driver-Briggs** suggests the mutterers are “either ventriloquists or whisperers of charms.” Compare **Isaiah 8:19** and **29:4**.

Alexander states that it has reference to “the ancient mode of incantation,” the chanting or uttering of words supposed to have magical power.

**Rahlf**s translates by τὰ ἀγάλματα αὐτῶν, “the statues / images of theirs.”

<sup>17</sup>The feminine plural Hebrew noun **הַאֲבוֹת**, is defined by **Brown-Driver-Briggs** as “the bottles (made from animal skin),” or “the necromancers,” that is, those who use magic to communicate with the dead.

See the helpful article by Harry A. Hoffner in **Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament** I, pp. 130-34, who states that “The **Old Testament** uses **אֲבוֹת** in three different senses:

- (1) the pit which has been dug out, by means of which the spirits of the dead are called up;
- (2) the spirit or spirits of the dead which are troubled;
- (3) the necromancer who calls forth the spirits to get information.” (P. 133)

The classic passage for this use is found in **1 Samuel 28**, in its story of King Saul and the Witch of Endor.

**Rahlf**s translates by καὶ τοὺς ἐκ τῆς γῆς φωνοῦντας, “and those speaking out of the earth.”

Kaiser translates by “those who return,” evidently referring to the dead who are summoned back to speak to the living.

<sup>18</sup>Where our Hebrew text has הַיְדֵעָנִים, “the familiar spirits,” either as *the knowing ones, wise ones* (acquainted with secrets of the unseen world); or as *intimate acquaintances* of the necromancer, **Rahlfs** has τοὺς ἐγγαστριμύθους, “the ventriloquists,” i.e., those who can speak or utter sounds so that they seem to come from somewhere else.

Evidently the Greek translator did not believe in “familiar spirits,” and so translates the word in terms of a trick performed by the medium involved.

Watts thinks הַיְדֵעָנִים may mean “the fortune-tellers.” (P. 250)

Gray comments that ‘In their perplexity the Egyptians will turn for counsel to their idols and to the spirits of the dead; but they will get no help. Their idols are as frightened (**verse 1**) as themselves [in the presence of Yahweh].’ (P. 324)

<sup>19</sup>Alexander translates **verse 4**: “*And I will shut up Egypt in the hands of a hard master, and a strong king shall rule over them, saith the Lord Jehovah of hosts.*” He comments that the opening phrase, וְסִכְרֹתַי [“and I will shut up / stop up”] “means to shut up wherever it occurs, the intensive form [piel] here used cannot have the weaker sense of ‘giving up, delivering, in which some [now including **Brown-Driver-Briggs** and **Holladay**] take it.” (P. 350)

Alexander concludes that the overall meaning of the verse is a description “in a general way [of] the political vicissitudes of Egypt, one of which would be subjection to an arbitrary power, whether foreign or domestic, or to both at different periods of its history.” (P. 350)

Motyer comments on **verse 4**, “Finally, there is dictatorship. The fulfilment may have been the ‘Ethiopian’ Pharaoh Piankhi (715 B.C.E.), the conquests of Sargon II (compare **Isaiah 20:1ff.**) or Sennacherib, or the invasion and conquest of Egypt by Esarhaddon (680 B.C.E.), Ashurbanipal (668 B.C.E.), or the Persian Artaxerxes III Ochus (343 B.C.E.)...’Seven times in four verses as though by sheer repetition to nail down the judgment’ (Herbert).” (P. 165)

All of these that Motyer names could perhaps be seen as a fulfilment of Isaiah’s prediction of **verse 4**, but none of them can be remotely considered a fulfilment of the entirety of **chapter 19**—and all of the events in **chapter 19** are presented as connected.

Watts states that “The identity of the cruel masters and powerful king has been debated. Bright (**History of Israel**, p. 281) suggests the Ethiopian Pianchi who took over upper Egypt in 730 B.C.E. Kitchen (**The Third Intermediate Period**, p. 125) suggests that it is Shabaka who first established the authority of the Ethiopian dynasty over the cites of the Delta in 716-12 B.C.E. This suggestion fits the polarity of Egypt-

(continued...)

וּמֶלֶךְ עַז יִמְשַׁל-בָּם

נָאֵם הָאֲדוֹן יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת:

And I will shut up / deliver Egypt into (the) hand of hard lords / masters,<sup>20</sup>  
and a strong / fierce king<sup>21</sup> will rule over them--<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>(...continued)

Ethiopia in **chapters 18-19** and the basic time frame of this section of **Isaiah**. Shabaka clearly fits the context best...

“There has been no lack of other suggestions...Wildberger favors Sargon since, in his opinion, this refers to a foreign domination. And Ethiopia is not foreign enough. If one breaks away from the contextual setting, almost any king that ever conquered Egypt will do. And there have been many.” (P. 253) See footnote 11 with Watts’ confident assertion that the text is speaking of Shabaka.

We think all of these are simply guesses, with no real basis for a firm decision. And when the passage as a whole is considered, it is obvious that there never has been a time in recorded history when the prediction has been fulfilled.

<sup>20</sup>Oswalt notes that the adjective “harsh” (our “hard”) is singular, while אֲדֹנָיִם, “lords” is plural. He explains that the plural use of “lord” is “generally regarded as a plural of majesty.” (P. 364) He is referring to the fact that the plural noun commonly used in Hebrew for God, אֱלֹהִים, has singular adjectives, when referring to the one true God.

Watts suggests that “The plural may well describe local tyrants who are forced, in turn, to render allegiance to a higher ruler.” (P. 250)

<sup>21</sup>Slotki’s translation has “a cruel lord,” and “a fierce king.” He comments that “Cambyses or Xerxes has been suggested by some authorities; others think of Esarhaddon or Assurbanipal who ravaged Egypt in 672 and 662 respectively.” (P. 88)

In the Hebrew text, the first noun, אֲדֹנָיִם, is plural, “lords”; while the second noun, מֶלֶךְ, is singular, “king.” **Rahlf**s has the first noun plural, κυρίων, “lords,” and the second noun also plural, βασιλεῖς, “kings.”

Alexander observes that the king here mentioned is identified by various authors as Sethos, Psammetichus, Sennacherib, Sargon, Nebuchadnezzar, Cambyses or Ochus, even Charlemagne. He states that “The very multiplicity of these explanations [identifications] shows how fanciful they are.” (P. 350) We agree. And we note how

(continued...)

a saying of the Lord YHWH of Armies!<sup>23</sup>

19:5<sup>24</sup> וְנִשְׁתַּוְּ-מִיָּם מִהַיָּם

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<sup>21</sup>(...continued)

many different interpretations are given to passages in the **Book of Isaiah**, showing how fanciful they are. What do you think? How do you explain all the differences?

<sup>22</sup>Gray comments that “Even if the writer had some definite individual in his mind whom he expected to subdue Egypt, the adjectives by which he describes him tell us little.” (Pp. 324-25) And again we note the lack of clarity in the prophetic message.

<sup>23</sup>Where our Hebrew text has the unusual phrase **יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת**, “the Lord YHWH of Armies,” **Rahlf**s omits the first word, having only κύριος σαβαωθ, “Lord (its normal translation of YHWH) Sabaoth (transliteration of the Hebrew plural noun, ‘armies’). Translation of the entire Hebrew phrase would be ὁ κύριος κύριος σαβαωθ, “the Lord, Lord Sabaoth.”

Kaiser comments that “The solemn formula of attribution [stating who is the cause]...emphasizes the unlimited power of the God Who is here proclaiming His will, and who as ‘the Lord’ controls all heavenly and earthly powers.” (P. 101)

<sup>24</sup>Slotki states that **verses 5-10** depict “Agricultural and industrial ruin.” (P. 88)

Oswalt comments on these verses that “It is not an overstatement to say that without the Nile there would be no Egypt. Without the life-giving flow of water out of central Africa the Sahara would simply extend unbroken to the shores of the Red Sea, for there is little or no rainfall east of the Sahara, making Egypt completely dependent upon irrigation water from the Nile. Very literally the desert begins where the irrigation canals end...

“The annual flood, bringing new alluvium [a deposit of clay, silt, sand, and gravel left by flowing streams in a river valley or delta, typically producing fertile soil] and washing the former year’s debris out to sea, could be expected to begin during the same week every year. Likewise, the receding of the flood waters could be expected to start in the same week annually. The predictability and abundance of this life resource contributed to the complacency and self-confidence of the Egyptian people, but it also created a tremendous dependency. If the Nile were ever shut off, this rich and seductive Egypt would cease to be. This critical weakness is what Isaiah is emphasizing in this strophe: why depend upon a country whose only resource for life was not in its own hands, but in the hands of Israel’s God?” (Pp. 368-69)

Yes...but Oswalt’s question is his—this passage doesn’t raise the question. Nor does the passage say anything about the Nile’s regularity contributing to “complacency and self-confidence of the Egyptian people.” These are all Oswalt’s ideas, not based on the biblical text.

(continued...)

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<sup>24</sup>(...continued)

Motyer comments on **verses 5-10**: “The Nile is referred to by name five times and by a synonym four times...The Nile was the basis of Egypt’s proverbial productivity. The drying up of the Nile (**verse 5**) is a figurative description of coming economic decay –such a decay as would make one wonder if the Nile had gone!” (P. 165)

With this, Motyer joins with Alexander and Oswalt is claiming the prediction is only meant figuratively—because as he (and they) well knows, the prediction has never been fulfilled as it is stated. And there is not a word in the prophecy to indicate it is meant figuratively—rather, the language appears to be meant literally.

Motyer goes on to say “But the cause is the breakdown of national morale (**verses 1-3**). When a nation’s spirit evaporates and sectional interests predominate, when no plan seems to prosper, then the means to make industry thrive may well be there (and the Nile flow as before) but the will to exploit the asset is gone.” (P. 165)

Watts comments on **verses 5-10** that “The failure of the Nile to provide sufficient water is the ultimate nightmare for the Egyptian.” (P. 253)

See “The Prophecy of Neferti” in James B. Pritchard’s **Ancient Near Eastern Texts**, pp. 444-46. Included are the following statements that Nefer-rohu made to the Pharaoh, who wrote them down:

“The land is (so) damaged (the) there is no one who is concerned with it, no one who speaks, no one who weeps. How is this land? The sun disc is covered over...The rivers of Egypt are empty, (so that) the water is crossed on foot. Men seek for water for good things, those fish-ponds, (where there were) those who clean fish, overflowing with fish and fowl. Everything good is disappeared, and the land is prostrate...Foes have arisen in the east, and Asiatics have come down into Egypt...”

As the words of Nefer-rohu come to a close, he predicts the coming of a king who will deliver the nation from its devastating condition: “(Then) it is that a king will come, belonging to the south, Ameni [apparently an abbreviation for Amen-em-het I], the triumphant, his name. He is the son of a woman of the land of Nubia; he is one born in Upper Egypt. He will take the [White] Crown; he will wear the Red Crown [and] [symbolic of being ruler of all Egypt]...Rejoice ye people of his time! The son of a man will make his name forever and ever!...There will be built the Wall of the Ruler...and the Asiatics will not be permitted to come down into Egypt that they might beg for water in their customary manner, in order to let their beasts drink...” (Pp. 445-46)

Watts comments on **The Prophecy of Neferti** that “The text is much earlier than Isaiah’s time, but illustrates Egypt’s dependence on the Nile’s rise and fall...”

“Egypt’s troubles are cumulative and interrelated. The external political pressures (**19:4**) combine with internal ones (**19:2-3**) and natural economic disasters

(continued...)

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<sup>24</sup>(...continued)

(**19:5-10**) to bring Egypt to its knees.” (P. 254)

Alexander translates / comments on **verse 5**, “*And the waters shall be dried up from the sea, and the river shall fail and be dried up.* Three distinct verbs are here used in the sense of drying up, for which our [English] language does not furnish equivalents...

“As the Nile has in all ages been called a sea by the Egyptians...most interpreters suppose it to be here referred to...Gesenius and others understand the passage as foretelling a literal failure of the irrigation upon which the fertility of Egypt depends...

“[But Alexander holds that] this is a prediction of Egypt’s national decline and fall, clothed in figures drawn from the characteristic features of its actual condition. As the desolation of our own western territory might be poetically represented as the drying up of the Mississippi and its branches, so a like event in the history of Egypt would be still more naturally described as a desiccation of the Nile, because that river is still more essential to the prosperity of the country which it waters...

“In favor of this figurative exposition is the difficulty of applying the description to particular historical events.” (Pp. 350-51)

This sounds like an admission that since the prophecy was not literally fulfilled, it must not have been meant literally, only “metaphorically.” That is one way of dealing with the problems that constantly confront the student of biblical prophecy, but it is rooted in the conviction that biblical prophets were given exact, clear visions of the future that could serve as detailed “road-maps” to the future.

Instead of that, we view the Hebrew prophets as people of faith, who were given visions of the future which were hazy, not precise or exact. See our footnote 1, with its reference to **Numbers 12:6-8** and **1 Corinthians 13:9-12**, both of which state explicitly the inexact, enigmatic, puzzling, partial nature of prophecy.

Gray entitles **verses 5-10** “The Nile is to dry up.”

He comments that “Between **verses 1-4** and **11-15**, which prophesy political disaster, comes this prediction that the Nile and the Nile-streams will run dry; that all vegetation dependent on them will wither away; and that all classes of people directly or indirectly dependent on the Nile or the vegetation promoted by it will be distressed.” (P. 325)

Kaiser entitles **verses 5-10** “The destruction of the basis of life in Egypt.” He comments that “The second stanza announces an intensification of the disaster in the form of a great drought...Its content looks beyond the foreign ruler [previously

(continued...)

וְנָהָר יִחַרֵּב וַיִּבְשׁ׃

And they will be dried up—waters from the sea;

and a river / wadi will be dried up (synonym) and will be dry.<sup>25</sup>

19:6<sup>26</sup> וְהָאֲזִיחָהּ נִהְרֹת

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<sup>24</sup>(...continued)

mentioned] (compare **verse 4**) to the period of internal demoralization which is to come...

“The drought caused by the drying up of the Nile [and its canals]...is a consequence of the coming and intervention of Yahweh. It is to bring an end to the proverbial fertility of Egypt...

“If the Nile summer floods, whose natural causes were still a mystery to Herodotus [484-425 B.C.E.], did not take place, not only would it mean the end of the reeds, papyrus and rushes, the plants which grow wild on the banks, but also of agriculture. With the simultaneous collapse of the fisheries and the production of linen, which was an important export, the economic catastrophe would be complete. Fish formed part of the main nourishment of ordinary people...The generalizing term ‘all who work for hire’ among those particularly affected, shows the author’s sense of reality. He knew that in an economic crisis it is above all the poorer people who bear the burden.” (Pp. 102-03)

<sup>25</sup>Slotki comments on the words “sea” and “river,” that “The Nile, when it annually overflows its banks, has the appearance of an island sea; at other times merely that of a river. Both sea and river will dry up.” (P. 88) Compare **Job 14:11** for similar language.

אֲזַל־מֵי־מִיָּם מִנֵּי־יָם׃  
וְנָהָר יִחַרֵּב וַיִּבְשׁ׃

Waters went from a sea / lake (ים)

and a river / wadi dries up and becomes dry (synonym)...

Oswalt similarly states, “*the sea* probably refers to the appearance of the Nile in Lower Egypt when it is in flood. The low hillocks all appear to be islands and the water reaches to the horizon.” (P. 369)

<sup>26</sup>Oswalt comments on **verses 6-7** that “The immediate result of the river’s drying up would be the desiccation [extreme drying] of the lush plant life along its edges. Not only would the rushes and characteristic papyrus reed disappear, but the sown fields

(continued...)



דִּלְלוּ וַחֲרַבוּ יְאֲרֵי מִצְוֹר

קִנְהַ וְסוּף קָמְלוּ:

And rivers / streams<sup>27</sup> will stink;<sup>28</sup>

they were brought low, and they will dry up--Nile-canals of Matsor.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>(...continued)

would be reduced to nothing in short order...

“Note the powerful language expressing this: in Hebrew only three words, ‘dried, blown, nothing.’ Throughout her history Egypt was able to export grain to the rest of the world...but if the Nile were cut off that export would promptly cease.” (P. 369)

We do not see “only three words” in the Hebrew text. Do you?

Alexander translates / comments on **verse 6**: “*And the rivers shall stink (or become putrid), the streams of Egypt are emptied and dried up, reed and rush sicken (pine or wither).*” (P. 351)

<sup>27</sup>Watts notes that נְהַרֹת, our ‘rivers / streams,’ “may refer to branches of the Nile or to its network of canals.” (P. 250)

<sup>28</sup>Where our Hebrew text has וְהָאֲנִיחוּ, which we translate by “and they will stink,” 1QIs<sup>a</sup> omits the letter *aleph*, thereby correcting the spelling. Watts notes that this is its only occurrence in the **Hebrew Bible**, and that it “probably means ‘they stink.’” (P. 250) Again we note, that when a word occurs only once in the Hebrew Bible, it is very difficult, if not impossible, to determine its meaning.

<sup>29</sup>The last two words of this line, יְאֲרֵי מִצְוֹר, literally “Niles of Matsor,” are given varying translations:

**King James**, “the brooks of defence”;

**Tanakh**, “Egypt's canals”;

**New Revised Standard**, “the branches of Egypt's Nile”;

**New International**, “the streams of Egypt”;

**New Jerusalem**, “the rivers of Egypt”;

**Rahfs**, καὶ αἱ διώρυγες τοῦ ποταμοῦ, “and the trenches / conduits / canals of the river.”

Slotki's translation has “rivers” and “streams,” and he comments that they are referring to “the irrigation canals and watercourses which intersected the lands of the

(continued...)

Stalk(s) and reed(s) were decayed.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>(...continued)  
Nile.” (P. 89)

Oswalt states that “*the streams* probably denote the canals, and *the rivers of Egypt* the branches of the Nile in the Delta.” (P. 369)

Alexander explains that “The older writers [before the mid-nineteenth century] take **מִצְוֹר** in its usual meaning of defense or fortification, and understand the whole phrase as denoting either the moats and ditches of fortified places, or walled reservoirs. The modern [mid-19th century] writers regard **מִצְוֹר** as the singular of **מִצְרִים**, denoting either Lower Egypt or the whole country indiscriminately.” (P. 351)

Watts notes that “**מִצְוֹר** is singular whereas Egypt is usually a dual [**מִצְרִים**]. Delitzsch, Dillmann, and Kittel thought it referred only to lower Egypt. None of the [ancient] versions understood it to mean Egypt.” (P. 250)

Kaiser states that “Since the usual **מִצְרִים** is a dual form [i.e., ‘two Egypts’], the author may intend to show that his is thinking of one Egypt, and more precisely of Lower Egypt.” (P. 98)

**Brown-Driver-Briggs** states that **מִצְוֹר** can be understood as a proper name for a territory, a synonym for **מִצְרִים**, when used in poetry, as here, **Isaiah 19:6**, and also **2 Kings 19:24** which is the same as **Isaiah 37:25**; **Micah 7:12** has **וְעָרֵי מִצְוֹר**, “and cities of Matsor.”

The Greek translators did not know what to make of this word, and translated differently each time it occurred: *καὶ αἱ διώρυγες τοῦ ποταμοῦ*, “and the trenches / conduits / canals of the river” (**Isaiah 19:6**, here); *πάντας ποταμοὺς περιοχῆς*, “all rivers of a portion” (**2 Kings 19:24**); *συναγωγὴν ὕδατος*, “gathering of water” (**Isaiah 37:25**); and *καὶ αἱ πόλεις σου*, “and the cities of yours” (**Micah 7:12**).

And again we note the puzzling lack of clarity of the prophetic message, exactly what we should expect in the light of **Numbers 12:6-8** and **1 Corinthians 13:9-12**.

<sup>30</sup>The Hebrew verb **קָמְלוּ**, our “(they) decayed” (so, **Brown-Driver-Briggs**) occurs only here and in **Isaiah 33:9**. As Watts notes, scholars have suggested the translation “became black,” or “were afflicted with lice.” Our English translations vary from “shall wither” to “shall decay,” to “will rot away,” to “will turn black.” **Rahlf**s has *ξηρανθήσεται*, “will be dried up.” It is very difficult to determine the exact meaning of

(continued...)

19:7<sup>31</sup> עֲרוֹת עַל-יְאֹר עַל-פִּי יְאֹר

וְכָל מִזְרַע יְאֹר

יִיבֹשׁ נֶהָר וְאֵינָנִי

Reed-grass<sup>32</sup> beside (the) Nile, beside (the) Nile's mouth / delta;<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup>(...continued)

rarely used words such as this.

<sup>31</sup>Slotki states that **verse 7** depicts the “destruction of agriculture.” (P. 89)

Alexander translates / comments on **verse 7**: “*The meadows by the river, by the mouth of the river, and all the sown ground of the river, shall wither, being driven away, and it is not (or shall be no more).*” (P. 351) But no, the Hebrew phrase וְאֵינָנִי does not translated “shall be no more.” It is “and it is not”—as Isaiah sees in his vision.

Motyer comments that “The picture of the collapse of the economic basis of Egypt’s life is carried faithfully through. First the failure of water, then the decline of agriculture and, finally, soil erosion (the fields will blow away / ‘be driven away’).” (P. 165)

<sup>32</sup>Translations of the first line of **verse 7** vary, largely due to uncertainty as to the meaning of the Hebrew word עֲרוֹת, ‘**aroth**, which occurs only here in the **Hebrew Bible**:

**King James**, “The paper reeds by the brooks, by the mouth of the brooks”;

**Tanakh**, “And the Nile papyrus by the Nile-side”;

**New Revised Standard**, “There will be bare places by the Nile, on the brink of the Nile”;

**New International**, “also the plants along the Nile, at the mouth of the river”;

**New Jerusalem**, “the Nile-plants on the banks of the Nile”;

**Rahlfs**, καὶ τὸ ἄχι τὸ χλωρὸν πᾶν τὸ κύκλω τοῦ ποταμοῦ, “and the green *achi*, all that around the river.” The Greek word ἄχι is also spelled ἄχει, and evidently means “reed-grass.” It is found with the spelling ἄχει in:

**Genesis 41:2**,

And look— arising from the Nile, seven cows,  
beautiful of appearance, and fat-fleshed;

and they were feeding in the rushes (וּבְאֵתָן, Hebrew; ἐν τῷ ἄχει, Greek).

(continued...)

and everything sown (beside the) Nile  
will dry up<sup>34</sup>--driven away,<sup>35</sup> and it is no longer!<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>32</sup>(...continued)

**Genesis 41:18,**

And look--going up from the Nile, seven cows, fat-fleshed ones, and beautiful  
ones of appearance;  
and they were feeding in the rushes (same as **41:2**).

It is found with the spelling ᾗχλ in:

**Isaiah 19:7** (here),

Reed-grass beside (the) Nile,  
beside (the) Nile's mouth;  
and everything sown (beside the) Nile will dry up--  
driven away, and it is no longer!

**Ben Sirach 40:16,**

Reed-grass beside any water,  
and bank of a river,  
before every (other) grass will be pulled up.  
(It's much easier to pull up reed-grass in the mud than grass on dry-land!)

Oswalt concludes that "papyrus" is the best reading. (P. 364)

<sup>33</sup>The Hebrew phrase is עַל־פִּי יְאֹר, literally, "upon mouth of a Nile." We are translating in terms of the Delta as the "mouth" of the Nile, where the Nile flows into the Mediterranean, and where the alluvium or sediment is deposited. But translations of the phrase vary, from "by the mouth of the brooks," to "by the Nile-side," to "on the brink of the Nile," to "at the mouth of the river," to "on the banks of the Nile," to πᾶν τὸ κύκλω τοῦ ποταμοῦ, "all that is around the river."

<sup>34</sup>Where our Hebrew text spells יִבֶּשׁ, qal imperfect, "will dry up," 1QIs<sup>a</sup> spells יִבֵּשׁ, qal perfect, "was dried up."

<sup>35</sup>Alexander states that the niph'al perfect verb, נִבְּרַח, our "driven away," "is commonly supposed to refer to the driving away of the withered and pulverized herbage by the wind." (P. 352)

<sup>36</sup>Translations of **verse 7** vary:

(continued...)

<sup>36</sup>(...continued)

**King James**, “The paper reeds by the brooks, by the mouth of the brooks, and every thing sown by the brooks, shall wither, be driven away, and be no *more*.”

**Tanakh**, “And the Nile papyrus by the Nile-side And everything sown by the Nile Shall wither, blow away, and vanish.”

**New Revised Standard**, “There will be bare places by the Nile, on the brink of the Nile; and all that is sown by the Nile will dry up, be driven away, and be no more.”

**New International**, “also the plants along the Nile, at the mouth of the river. Every sown field along the Nile will become parched, will blow away and be no more.”

**New Jerusalem**, “the Nile-plants on the banks of the Nile; all the vegetation of the Nile, will wither, blow away and be no more.”

**Rahfs**, καὶ τὸ ἄχι τὸ χλωρὸν πᾶν τὸ κύκλω τοῦ ποταμοῦ καὶ πᾶν τὸ σπειρόμενον διὰ τοῦ ποταμοῦ ξηρανθήσεται ἀνεμόφθορον, “and the green reed-grass, all that is around the river, and all that is being sown through (διὰ) the river will be dried up, blasted by wind.” (Notice that the phrase “and be no more” is omitted by the Greek translation.)

Slotki’s translation has “The mosses by the Nile, by the brink of the Nile, And all that is sown by the Nile.” He comments that “The Hebrew word [for ‘the mosses’] is of uncertain meaning. A proposed translation is ‘bare places are on the Nile, on the very brink of the Nile’...[Instead of] ‘all that is sown by the Nile,’ better, ‘the seed-land of the Nile,’ i.e. the alluvial deposit which is left after the inundation and makes the soil fertile.” (P. 89)

<sup>37</sup>Slotki states that **verse 8** depicts “Ruin of the fishing industry.”

Gray states that “In the dry river-bed no fish can live. This would deeply affect the whole of the poorer classes, who largely fed on the abundant fish supply of the Nile.” (P. 326)

Oswalt likewise states that ‘As the Nile and its streams dried up and the plant life died, so also would the marine life in the river itself die. It is apparent that one of the major industries of Egypt was fishing (compare **Numbers 11:5; Ezekiel 29:4**), and this industry would of course cease at once if the river should ever stop flowing.” (Pp. 269-70)

Alexander translates / comments on **verse 8**: “*And the fishermen shall mourn, and they shall lament, all the throwers of a hook in to the river (Nile), and the spreaders of a net upon the surface of the water, languish...*”

“Having described the effect of the drought on vegetation, he now describes its effect upon those classes of the people who were otherwise dependent on the river for subsistence. The multitude of fishes in the Nile, and of people engaged in catching them, is attested both by ancient and modern writers...

(continued...)

וְאֵבְלוּ כָּל-מִשְׁלִיכֵי בִּיאֹר חֶכְהָ  
וּפְרָשֵׁי מַכְמֶרֶת עַל-פְּנֵי-מַיִם אִמְלָלוּ:

And the fishermen<sup>38</sup> will mourn,  
and everyone throwing a hook into the Nile will mourn (synonym);  
and those throwing a net<sup>39</sup> over the waters' surface grew feeble.<sup>40</sup>

19:9<sup>41</sup> וּבָשׁוּ עֲבָדֵי פִשְׁתִּים שְׂרִיקוֹת

<sup>37</sup>(...continued)

“This verse is not to be applied to an actual distress among the fishermen at any one time, but to be viewed as a characteristic trait in the prophetic picture...So...when he speaks of a country abounding in fisheries and fishermen, he describes their conditions as an index or symbol of the state of the country. In like manner, a general

distress in our southern States might be described as a distress among the sugar, cotton, or tobacco planters.” (P. 352)

Again, we note, since there is no historical record of the prediction's actually having been fulfilled in Egyptian history, Alexander, in line with his view of biblical prophecy, insists that the prediction is not meant literally, but only figuratively.

We say, Don't expect too much from biblical prophecy—as if it is meant to give accurate, detailed pictures of the future. The prophetic vision is enigmatic / puzzling (**Numbers 12:6-8**), “seen through a mirror darkly or dimly” (**1 Corinthians 13:9-12**).

<sup>38</sup>Where our Hebrew text has הַדְּרִיגִים, “the fishermen,” 1QIs<sup>a</sup> has הַדְּרָגִים, “the fish.”

<sup>39</sup>Slotki's translation has “cast angle” and “spread nets.” He comments that “Both these methods of fishing are depicted on Egyptian monuments.” (P. 89) See on the Internet, “Fishing depicted on Egyptian monuments.”

<sup>40</sup>Where the first two verbs in this verse are imperfect (“future tense”), this last verb is perfect (“past tense”). Translations of the last verb vary, from “shall languish,” to “will pine away,” to “will lose heart,” to *πευθήσουσιν*, “will mourn,” all using the future tense. Our translation is “grew feeble.”

<sup>41</sup>Slotki states that **verse 9** depicts “Cessation of the manufacture of textiles.” (P. 89)

Gray states that the verse depicts “The distress of the flax-workers.” He comments that “Much flax was grown in Egypt, and the growth and preparation of it formed an important industry. Failure of water meant failure of the crop.” (P 326) We

(continued...)

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<sup>41</sup>(...continued)

agree, since without water the flax plant could not be grown, and without water it could not be worked to produce linen.

Oswalt likewise comments on **verse 9** that “Another industry representative of the total Egyptian life would be the production of linen from flax. Like the previous two, this process was completely dependent on water, both for growing the flax and for making the linen from the flax. As in the other areas, the author exhibits detailed knowledge of Egyptian life in his reference to combing or carding, which was necessary to break down the flax fibers [stems] to produce a thread.” (P. 379)

There are a number of You Tube productions on the Internet showing the details of the growth of the flax-plant, with its beautiful flowers, and the careful, labor-intensive work that is demanded in order to produce linen from the harvested flax plants.

Translations of **verse 9** vary:

**King James**, “Moreover they that work in fine flax, and they that weave networks, shall be confounded.”

**Tanakh**, “The flax workers, too, shall be dismayed, Both carders and weavers chagrined.”

**New Revised Standard**, “The workers in flax will be in despair, and the carders and those at the loom will grow pale.”

**New International**, “Those who work with combed flax will despair, the weavers of fine linen will lose hope.”

**New Jerusalem**, “The workers of carded flax and the weavers of white cloth will be confounded.”

**Rahfs**, καὶ αἰσχύνη λήμψεται τοὺς ἐργαζομένους τὸ λίνον τὸ σχιστὸν καὶ τοὺς ἐργαζομένους τὴν βύσσον, “and shame will take hold of those working the parted / divided / carded flax-plant, and those working the fine linen.”

**Alexander**, “*And ashamed* (disappointed or confounded) *are the workers of combed* (or hatchelled [flax fibers separated with a hatchel / comb] *flax, and the weavers of white* (stuffs / materials).”

“Carders” are fiber preparation tools; “carding” is the processing / brushing / combing of raw or washed fibers—anything from dog hair to llama, to soy fiber to polyester—to prepare them for use in the manufacture of textiles. The first part of this process is “teasing,” that is, gently pulling or combing something tangled, especially wool or hair, into separate strands. Then comes the breaking up of locks and unorganized clumps of fiber, and aligning the individual fibers to be parallel with each other, making them ready for spinning—which is the process of twisting together the drawn out strands of fibers to form thread or yarn, which can then be used in the making of cloth through processes of weaving, knitting, crocheting, bonding, etc., now done amazingly rapidly by machines—but in the ancient world, all done slowly, by hand.

(continued...)

## וְאֲרָגִים חוֹרֵי:

And they will be ashamed, those working with carded / combed flax,<sup>42</sup>  
and those weaving white cotton.<sup>43</sup>

19:10<sup>44</sup> וְהָיוּ שְׂתִיתִיה מִדְּכָאִים

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<sup>41</sup>(...continued)

A “loom” is a device used to weave cloth—it holds the “warp” threads (the lengthwise or longitudinal threads in a roll) under tension to enable the interweaving of the “weft” or “woof” threads (the threads or yarn which is drawn through the “warp” threads to create cloth. See on the Internet the numerous pictures of ancient looms in Greece and Egypt.

Alexander comments that “The older writers suppose the class of persons here described to be the manufacturers of nets for fishing, and took חוֹרֵי [our ‘white cotton’] in the sense of perforated open-work, or net-work. The moderns understand the verse as having reference to the working of flax and the manufacture of linen...

“Some of the older writers identified שְׂרִיקוֹת [our ‘carded / combed’] with *sericum*, the Latin word for silk.” (P. 352)

We are impressed with Isaiah’s knowledge of, and interest in the agriculture and industries (manufacture of textiles) of a foreign country. He sounds in some ways like an ancient forerunner of Herodotus—only his observations are in the interest of proclaiming a Divine message that he has received through enigmatic vision.

<sup>42</sup>The last word in this line, שְׂרִיקוֹת, a feminine plural, our ‘carded / combed’ occurs only here in the **Hebrew Bible**, making its meaning very difficult to determine. **Brown-Driver-Briggs** has “carded,” “combed.” **Holladay** has “carded (flax).”

Watts notes that פְּשִׁתִּים, literally “flaxes,” “linens,” is the plural of פֶּשֶׁת, which means “the stems of flax which must be worked to obtain the hemp fiber needed for spinning.” (P. 251)

<sup>43</sup>Where our Hebrew text has חוֹרֵי, **choray**, which **Brown-Driver-Briggs** defines as “white stuff,” 1QIs<sup>a</sup> has חוֹרוֹ, “they grew pale,” or “they bleached,” and **Rahlf**s has τῆς βύσσου, “the linen.” Wildberger translates the verse by “The flax workers are dismayed: the combers and weavers of linen.” (Watts, p. 250)

<sup>44</sup>Alexander translates / comments on **verse 10**: “*And her pillars (or foundations) are broken down, all laborers for hire are grieved at heart...*”

(continued...)



## כָּל-עֹשֵׂי שֶׁכֶר אֲנִמֵי-נַפְשׁ:

And her buttocks / foundations / stays will be having been crushed;  
everyone working for pay<sup>45</sup> (will be) sad<sup>46</sup> of innermost-being.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>44</sup>(...continued)

“The older writers suppose the allusion to fisheries to be still continued, and arbitrarily make שְׂתוֹת mean ‘nets,’ and נַפְשׁ mean ‘fish.’ Others take שְׂתוֹת in the sense of ‘looms’ or ‘weavers,’ and עֹשֵׂי שֶׁכֶר in the sense of brewers or makers of strong drink, which last interpretation is as old as [Rahlf’s], οἱ τὸν ζῦθον ποιοῦντες, [‘the ones making the beer’]. The simplest exposition of the verse is that proposed by Gesenius and adopted by most succeeding writers, which regards this as a general description of distress extending to the two great classes of society, the pillars or chief men, and the laborers or commonality.” (Pp. 352-53)

And we wonder. Is the “simplest” exposition necessarily the correct exposition? Alexander assumes this throughout his massive commentary (which we admire), but we have learned that oftentimes a “simple” solution is wrong, and the true solution is complicated and difficult to understand. What do you think?

Gray comments on **verse 10** that “The distress of another set, or two sets of people, is here described: unfortunately the text or meaning of the terms is uncertain.” (P. 327) Yes...many Hebrew words are difficult to define, and translations are sometimes little more than guess-work!

Oswalt comments that “If the present translation [‘its pillars’] is correct, this is a generalizing statement that all of Egyptian society, from the high (‘the pillars’; compare **Psalm 11:3**) to the low (‘workers for hire’) will feel the impact of God’s acts upon the Nile. However, the versions have widely varying translations of שְׂתוֹת, ‘pillars.’ [Rahlf’s has] ‘its weavers’ [which] seems to make the most sense in the context of the preceding verse. That Akkadian *satu* and Coptic *stīt* mean ‘to weave’ suggests that [Rahlf’s] has preserved the original reading at this point. If this interpretation is correct, the verse is not a conclusion to **verses 5-9**, but is rather continuing the thought of **verse 9**.” (P. 370) Again we note the lack of clarity, the puzzling nature of the prophetic message!

### Remember

Oswalt’s two statements, “If the present translation is correct,” and “If this interpretation is correct,” showing his uncertainty both in translating and in interpreting this passage. We appreciate this candor / forthrightness—which is too often missing in doctrinaire commentaries which force the biblical text to fit into their religious dogmas whether it fits or not.

<sup>45</sup>Slotki’s translation has “All they that make dams,” and Slotki comments that this

(continued...)

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<sup>45</sup>(...continued)

means dams “to collect the water. On this translation, the verse refers, like **verse 8**, to the fishing industry; but this is improbable in view of the intervention of **verse 9**. Others render the Hebrew for *they that make dams* as ‘they that work for hire,’ and Eitan explains the word for foundations by connecting it with a similar Coptic word as ‘her (Egypt’s) weavers.’” (P. 89)

Where **Rahfs** has οἱ τὸν ζῦθον ποιοῦντες, “those making the beer,” Oswalt explains that it has resulted from a confusion between שָׂכָר, “hire,” “wages,” and שָׂכָר, “strong / intoxicating drink.” (P. 365)

<sup>46</sup>Watts translates the Hebrew plural construct אֲגַמִּי, which we translate by “sad of,” by “sick,” but notes that it “usually means ‘pools of.’” He notes that Latin Vulgate has *lacunas ad capiendos pisces*, “places for taking fish,” and some Hebrew manuscripts read מֵיִם אֲגַמִּי, “pools of water.” (P. 251)

<sup>47</sup>Translations of **verse 10** vary greatly:

**King James**, “And they shall be broken in the purposes thereof, all that make sluices and ponds for fish.”

**Tanakh**, “Her foundations shall be crushed, And all who make dams shall be despondent.”

**New Revised Standard**, “Its weavers will be dismayed, and all who work for wages will be grieved.”

**New International**, “The workers in cloth will be dejected, and all the wage earners will be sick at heart.”

**New Jerusalem**, “the weavers dismayed, all the workmen dejected.”

**Rahfs**, καὶ ἔσονται οἱ διαζόμενοι αὐτὰ ἐν ὀδύνη καὶ πάντες οἱ τὸν ζῦθον ποιοῦντες λυπηθήσονται καὶ τὰς ψυχὰς πονέσουσιν, “and the ones beginning them in the warp will be in pain, and all the ones making the beer will be grieved / pained; and will afflict the(ir) innermost-beings.”

**Slotki**, “And her foundations shall be crushed, All they that make dams shall be grieved in soul.”

These great variations in translation are rooted in the different understandings of the plural first word, שָׂתְתֵיהֶם, **shathotheyah**. Slotki comments that this means the foundations “of the fishing ponds and sluices [sliding gates for the control of water].” (P. 89)

In an overall evaluation of **verses 5-10**, Watts states that “The drought [what is described is in our estimation, far more than just a ‘drought’!] affects farmers, fishermen, and the secondary enterprises that depend upon them, in this case the textile workers. The speech is a remarkable description of economic distress that

(continued...)

<sup>47</sup>(...continued)

follows the failure of the annual Nile floods. The context draws upon the picture of Yahweh's reign over the weather and over nature (**19:1**) to account for the conditions. Egypt's troubles are cumulative and interrelated. The external political pressures (**19:4**) combine with internal ones (**19:2-3**) and natural economic disasters (**19:5-10**) to bring Egypt to its knees." (P. 254)

And we ask, are there historical records that show Egypt brought "to its knees" during the reign of Shabaka, who Oswalt claims to have been the fulfillment of this passage's prediction? We see no indications of that having happened.

<sup>48</sup>Slotki comments on **verses 11-15** that they depict "the stupidity of Egypt's counselors." (P. 89)

Gray entitles **verses 11-15** "The futility of the wise men."

He comments that "The wise men of Egypt, the princes of the old and famous cities of Tanis and Memphis (**verse 13**), are proved foolish by the event. They gave advice and formed plans, which Yahweh frustrates (**verse 3**), but they never discerned Yahweh's plan (**verse 12**), which is carried out. Consequently deceived by Yahweh (**verse 14a**), they delude themselves and their country (**verses 13-14**), and Egypt achieves nothing." (P. 328)

Oswalt comments on **verses 11-15** that "If Egypt had reason to boast of her rich religion and her great productivity, she also had reason to be proud of her ancient wisdom (compare **1 Kings 5:10**<sup>Heb</sup> / **4:30**<sup>Eng</sup>). The Egyptian wisdom literature, probably growing out of the highly organized court life, is some of the earliest and best preserved known to us..."

"Yet the Israelite prophet has the audacity to say that this tradition for wisdom is of no more value than the other two areas. This is so, in Gray's words, because Yahweh is able to frustrate their plans, while they cannot discover His..."

"In words similar to those addressed to the idols in **chapters 41-43**, Isaiah challenges the wise men to a contest. Can they show Pharaoh God's plan now (any more than their predecessors could during the exodus)? The answer is a flat no." (P. 370)

We think Isaiah's statement is over-statement, especially as Oswalt translates it: "The princes of Zoan are nothing but fools." The fact is, there was much wisdom in Egypt, and the **Book of Proverbs** acknowledged that fact by incorporating some of the teachings of Amenemope in its **chapters 22-23**.

See **Proverbs 22:17-23:11**, and our end-note 1 for parallels between the

(continued...)

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<sup>48</sup>(...continued)

### **Wisdom of Amenenope and Proverbs.**

Watts comments on **verses 11-15** that “The passage begins like an accusation. The speech asks the counselors of the court to defend themselves (**verse 11**). When they are silent, the speech turns to the Egyptians with the challenge that they make the wise men talk (**verse 12**). It closes by recognizing that Yahweh has caused the counsel of the wise to err (**verses 14-15**).” (P. 254)

Kaiser entitles **verses 11-15** “The helplessness of Egypt and its inability to act.”

He comments that “In spite of its famous wise men (compare **1 Kings 5:10**<sup>Heb</sup> / **4:30**<sup>Eng</sup>) Egypt is cast without preparation into the catastrophe brought upon it by Yahweh...Both on the border, in the region in which Yahweh’s power was once demonstrated against Egypt, in Zoan...and in the ancient capital of Lower Egypt, Memphis...the royal officials are seen to be incapable and stupid. These two cities... reflect the fact that the political center of gravity in the country lay during the author’s time in Lower Egypt.” (P. 103)

But the passage is a prophetic prediction of the future, and it should not be assumed that what is predicted is simply a mirror of the current conditions in which the prediction was made. And we remember the teaching attributed to Jesus in **Matthew 5:22** concerning the danger of calling someone a “fool.”

Motyer entitles **verses 11-13** “Political collapse,” and comments that “Within the ‘Cabinet’ folly reigns supreme...The leaders are unenlightened for all their claims (**verse 11**); they cannot read the signs of the times (**verse 12**) and can only mislead (**verse 13**).” (P. 165)

We say, the political leaders of Egypt lead astray and fail because they do not know, nor recognize, YHWH God the Creator, Whose purposes are being accomplished in their midst. The powerful hand of YHWH at work in Egypt had been demonstrated in the exodus of the Jewish slaves, and their neighboring country of Israel, with its prophets, spoke again and again of His reality, and His plans for Egypt. If they should humbly reach out to Israel, asking concerning YHWH, being open to seeking to know Him and letting Him guide them, they could become good and faithful leaders of their country. For Isaiah, the very first responsibility of political leaders is humility before God, and acknowledgment of their need for Divine guidance. Failing this, they will lead their followers astray. It is true of Northern Israel and Judah; it is just as true for Egypt! See our footnote 58.

Alexander translates / comments on **verse 11**: “*Only foolish* (i.e. entirely foolish) *are the princes of Zoan, the sages of the counselors of Pharaoh, (their) counsel is become brutish* (or irrational). *How can ye say to Pharaoh, I am the son of wise*

(continued...)

חֲכָמַי יַעֲצִי פִרְעָה עֵצָה נִבְעָרָה  
אֵיךְ תֵּאמְרוּ אֶל-פִּרְעָה  
בֶּן-חֲכָמִים אֲנִי  
בֶּן-מְלָכֵי-קָדָם:

Surely<sup>49</sup> Tsoan's<sup>50</sup>, <sup>2</sup> princes<sup>51</sup> (are) fools;<sup>52</sup>

<sup>48</sup>(...continued)

(fathers), *I am the son of kings of old?...*

“The reference is not merely to perplexity in actual distress, but also to an unwise policy as one of the causes of the distress itself.” (P. 353)

Watts comments on **verse 11** that “*Zoan* is usually identified as Tanis, the Egyptian Delta city nearest Palestine. The *counsel* that is required is political advice. The wise men of Egypt claimed a direct descent from the most ancient kings, who were also the most wise.” (P. 254)

Kaiser comments on **verse 11** that “The status claimed by the Egyptian court officials, who represent themselves to their king as heirs of their nation’s great tradition of wisdom and as members of ancient royal families, is in complete contrast to their actual ability.” (P. 103)

<sup>49</sup>Alexander holds that אֵיךְ does not mean “*for or surely,*” but “*only, nothing else, exclusively.*” (P. 353) We think he is being too sure in this conclusion, for such words can have a variety of meanings, from “surely,” to “howbeit,” to “only,” or “no doubt,” etc., and skilled Hebraists disagree on the meaning in specific passages. See the article in **Brown-Driver-Briggs**. Holladay mentions “surely, indeed,” “only,” and “however.” **Rahlf**s translates by καὶ, “and.”

<sup>50</sup>The noun זֵעַן, **tso’an**, commonly spelled Zoan, is translated Τάνεως, “of Tanis,” by the Greek and spelled Djanet in Egyptian hieroglyphic. For a **Wikipedia** article on Tanis see our end-note 2.

Slotki notes that Tanis / Zoan served as the capital of the Hyksos kings. (P. 90) The date assigned to the Hyksos kings by Noah Wiener, **The Expulsion of the Hyksos**, is in the Second Intermediate Period (18th-16th centuries B.C.E., 1700's to

(continued...)

wise people, counselors of Pharaoh<sup>53</sup> (give) stupid<sup>54</sup> counsel!<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>50</sup>(...continued)

1500's), towards the end of the Middle Bronze Age, when the West Asian (Canaanite) Hyksos controlled Lower (Northern) Egypt. In the 16th century, Ahmose I overthrew the Hyksos and initiated the eighteenth dynasty and the New Kingdom of Egypt.

Gray adds that Zoan / Tanis “are both transliterations of [the Egyptian name which in Coptic is Djanet], the name of the capital of the 14<sup>th</sup> nome of Lower Egypt. The city was situated in the Delta, on one of the eastern arms of the Nile near its mouth, and was thus one of the nearest of the great Egyptian cities to Palestine.” (Pp. 328-29)

<sup>51</sup>Oswalt comments that “*The princes of Zoan* refers to the officials of Tanis, which was the chief city of northern Egypt from the Middle Kingdom Age onward. It was situated on the east side of the Delta region and would be the first large Egyptian city encountered by a Semite traveling toward the Nile Valley. At several points when the nation had broken in two, Tanis had become the capital city of Lower Egypt. Thus one would expect her officials to be possessed of unusual perspective and awareness. In fact, says Isaiah, they are completely foolish. These supposedly insightful people are giving Pharaoh counsel which would not become an animal.” (P. 371)

<sup>52</sup>Oswalt’s translation is “The princes of Zoan are nothing but fools.” We are reminded of the warning made by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount against calling anyone a “fool” or “foolish” (**Matthew 5:22**). Isaiah is doing just that here in this passage, as Jesus himself did according to **Luke 11:40** in speaking to the Pharisees.

<sup>53</sup>Alexander states that “*Pharaoh* was a common title of the Egyptian kings. It is originally an Egyptian noun with the article prefixed.” (P. 353) It was derived from a hieroglyphic compound noun with a double meaning, “house” and “column.”

From **Wikipedia** we quote: “It was originally used only in larger phrases such as *smr pr-aa*, 'Courtier of the High House', with specific reference to the buildings of the court or palace. From the twelfth dynasty onward, the word appears in a wish formula 'Great House, may it live, prosper, and be in health,' but again only with reference to the royal palace and not the person.

“During the reign of Thutmose III about 1479–1425 B.C.E.) in the New Kingdom, after the foreign rule of the Hyksos during the Second Intermediate Period, pharaoh became the form of address for a person who was king.” (9/7/2016)

<sup>54</sup>Oswalt translates **נְבִיעָרָה** (a feminine singular niph'al participle) by “brutish.” We translate by “stupid.” Translations vary from “the counsel...is become brutish,” to “absurd predictions,” to “stupid counsel,” to “senseless advice” to “a stupid council,” to ἡ βουλή αὐτῶν μωρανθήσεται, “the counsel of theirs will be made foolish.”

(continued...)

How will you (plural) say to Pharaoh,  
I (am) a son of wise people,<sup>56</sup>  
son of kings (of) ancient time?<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>54</sup>(...continued)

Motyer states the verb “describes one untouched by true wisdom, living on the level of animal thoughtlessness (**Psalm 73:22**; compare **Psalm 49:21**<sup>Heb</sup> / **20**<sup>Eng</sup>).” (P. 166)

<sup>55</sup>The first two lines of **verse 11** are given slightly differing translations:

**King James**, “Surely the princes of Zoan *are* fools, the counsel of the wise counsellors of Pharaoh is become brutish...”

**Tanakh**, “Utter fools are the nobles of Tanis; The sagest of Pharaoh's advisers *Have made* absurd predictions.”

**New Revised Standard**, “The princes of Zoan are utterly foolish; the wise counselors of Pharaoh give stupid counsel.”

**New International**, “The officials of Zoan are nothing but fools; the wise counselors of Pharaoh give senseless advice.”

**New Jerusalem**, “Yes, the princes of Zoan are fools, Pharaoh's wisest councillors make up a stupid council.”

**Rahfs**, καὶ μωροὶ ἔσονται οἱ ἄρχοντες Τάνεως οἱ σοφοὶ σύμβουλοι τοῦ βασιλέως ἢ βουλὴ αὐτῶν μωρανθήσεται, “and the rulers of Tanis will be / become foolish, the wise counselors of the king—their counsel will be made foolish.”

Alexander comments that “The statesmen and courtiers of ancient Egypt belonged to the sacerdotal [relating to priests or the priesthood, with its sacrificial functions] caste, from which many of the kings were also taken.” (P. 253)

<sup>56</sup>Gray comments that “The poet dramatically asks these Egyptian counselors how, being really devoid of wit and wisdom, they have the effrontery to remind their king that they are, each one of them, by right of descent men of wisdom and rank. Professions, including those of the priests and wise men, were largely hereditary among the Egyptians.” (P. 329)

<sup>57</sup>Slotki comments that this is “the boast of each counselor, claiming to be a direct descendant from the priestly caste which produced the early dynasties, and whose possession of the wisdom of Egypt was regarded as hereditary.” (P. 90)

Alexander states that “The wisdom of Egypt seems to have been proverbial in the ancient world (**1 Kings 4:30**; **Acts 7:22**)...The interrogation implies the absurdity of their pretensions [to wisdom].” (P. 353)

Watts notes that “**מִיָּמֵינוּ** may mean ‘former times,’ or ‘the east.’ The wisdom of Edom and of Teman (compare **1 Kings 5:10** and **Jeremiah 49:7**) was famous. But in

(continued...)

<sup>57</sup>(...continued)

Egypt the wisdom of the past, especially of past kings, was highly favored.” (P. 251)

Oswalt comments on **verses 11b-12** that “In the language reminiscent of the later challenges to the Gods (**43:8; 44:6; 45:20**), Isaiah speaks directly to the wise men and then to the Pharaoh himself. To the wise men he asks in sarcasm how they even have the temerity [boldness, audacity] to claim to be a part of the class of wise men. ‘Son’ here does not mean so much a physical descendant as it does a member of a guild...Their plans have failed so many times that the prophet marvels that they are still willing to claim to be the heirs of the ancient wisdom. In fact, they do not understand either the past (**14:24-27; 37:27**) or the present.

“Turning to Pharaoh, the writer again uses the language of a sort echoed by Paul many years later (**1 Corinthians 1:20**). God is going to treat Egypt again as He did at the exodus. How will the wise men—who do not look at events in the light of faith in God—explain that? In fact, which of the Egyptian wise men is able to tell Pharaoh what God’s plan of attack will be? None of them is able to do so and the prophet wonders why Pharaoh even keeps them around.” (P. 371)

<sup>58</sup>Slotki states that in **verse 12** “the prophet turns from the counselors to Pharaoh himself.” (P. 90)

Gray comments: “The Pharaoh is now addressed. If he has any wise counselor they could tell him what Yahweh is about to do to Egypt. But no such counselors are to be found in Egypt, or among the priests of the Egyptian Gods.” (P. 329)

Alexander translates / comments on **verse 12**: “*Where (are) they? Where (are) thy wise men? Pray let them tell thee, and (if that is too much) let them (at least) know, what Jehovah of Hosts hath purposed against (or concerning) Egypt...It was a proof of their false pretensions that so far from being able to avert the evil, they could not even foresee it.*” (P. 353)

Kaiser states that “The test proposed to reveal their inability...goes far beyond what it was fair to expect of them, and can hardly have any purpose other than that of emphasizing the superiority of the Jewish prophets over the wise men of Egypt, and so of glorifying the God of the Jews (compare **Genesis 41; Isaiah 43:8ff.; 44:6ff.; 45:20ff.** and also **Daniel 2**).” (P. 103)

What do you think? Do you think it is fair to expect the wise counselors of Egypt to know about YHWH? And what do you think of the “wise people” of Israel? Do they have a superior wisdom to that of the Egyptians? Is the **Book of Proverbs** the final word in genuine wisdom, for example in its instructions concerning the discipline of children, or the treatment of human slaves? Our conclusion is that genuine wisdom is found in trembling awe before our Creator, and refusing to make claims of wisdom for ourselves. What is your conclusion?

(continued...)



וַיִּגִּדּוּ נָא לָךְ

וַיִּדְעוּ מִה־יַעַן יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת עַל־מִצְרַיִם:

Where then are they, your wise men?<sup>59</sup>

And let them declare now to you,

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<sup>58</sup>(...continued)

What if YHWH had revealed Himself to Egypt in the exodus, and made known to them His unrivaled power by enabling the Egyptian slaves to leave Egypt and build for themselves a new life in their own nation as claimed in the **Book of Exodus**? Should not the wise counselors in later times be aware of that historical fact, or at least be aware of Israel's claims concerning that past? Should they not be responsible for at least examining the claims of the Jewish prophets, and listening to the prophetic oracles directed at them? Should they not be seeking and searching for religious truth, being open to the claims made by Israel, their close neighbor, for YHWH's powerful acts that had been demonstrated in their nation's history in relation to Egypt?

What about modern kings, prime ministers, presidents, and their cabinets? Should they, like Hitler and Stalin, simply dismiss the claims of religion so important in their nation (the long-time Lutheran and Roman Catholic traditions in Germany; the long-time Russian Orthodox traditions in Russia) claiming that they are responsible to God for their actions, and warning that Germany and Russia would suffer terrifying judgment if they disregarded those religious traditions? Should their counselors have refused to be aware of such claims, and not made them known to their leaders?

Should America not listen to its long-time heritage of religious voices, warning that America is responsible to God for its actions, and for its failure to follow its heritage of religious teaching? And should not the counselors of our national leaders make it their responsibility to know what is going on in neighboring countries, even the most foreign of countries—especially among our enemies? Should they not be concerned with the religious views of our neighbors and enemies, especially with regards to plans of world-conquest, for example those of ISIS or other radical Muslim extremists?

No, Kaiser is, we think, wrong. It is not unfair to expect Egypt's wise counselors to know of what is happening in Israel and Assyria, and to inform the leaders of Egypt, especially since Egypt was named specifically in the history of Israel and in its prophetic tradition. True enough, the Egyptian leaders would probably reject such counsel as preposterous, as false—but wise counselors need to make themselves informed concerning all such matters, and make them known to their leaders! To be ignorant of them, and fail to inform their leaders of them is totally irresponsible!

<sup>59</sup>Slotki comments that this is “a rhetorical question, the expected answer to which is ‘nowhere; they cannot tell, and even they themselves do not know.’” (P. 90)

and they will know what YHWH of Armies counseled against Egypt.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>60</sup>Watts comments on **verse 12** that “The content of wisdom according to this speech lies in knowing what Yahweh of Hosts has planned against Egypt. This the wise men never claimed to know. But the message, actually addressed to Jerusalem and its leaders rather than the Egyptians, insists that this is the only basis for true wisdom and political counsel. **Chapters 18-19** are intended to elucidate exactly this plan for that period.” (P. 254)

What do you think? Do you believe that the **מִשַׁא בְּבַל**, “Burden / Oracle of Babylon,” (**Isaiah 13:1-14:27**) was really addressed to Jerusalem, not to Babylon? Even if spoken / written while Isaiah lived in Jerusalem, would it not have been his responsibility to make it known to Babylon, or Babylon’s representatives? Was it just intended for Jewish hearers / readers? The oracle certainly contains elements addressed to Israel—see especially **Isaiah 14:1-5**, but the song to be sung by Israel concerning Babylon’s king addresses the king in the second person singular—are we to think the song was not intended for the ears of Babylon’s / Assyria’s king?

Likewise, the burden / oracle in **Isaiah 14:28-32** is addressed, not to Israel, but to Philistia; is that message really addressed to Jerusalem and its leaders? We think not.

The burden / oracle of Moab, in **Isaiah 15:1-16:14**, with its vocabulary so peculiarly related to Moab and its geography, and with its author’s voice of weeping for Moab—are we to think that it was in reality addressed to Jerusalem, not to Moab? Especially here it seems clear that the prophetic message is intended for Moab’s eyes and ears, not Jerusalem’s!

The burden / oracle of Damascus in **Isaiah 17:1-9**, speaks of Damascus and its ally, Ephraim / Northern Israel in the third person, predicting their coming destruction, but changes to the second person direct address in **verses 10–11**, addressed primarily, we think, to Ephraim / Northern Israel, but certainly not to Jerusalem. It may be that Isaiah’s own people in Jerusalem are mentioned in the last two lines of **verse 14**, indicating that while the oracle is addressed to Damascus (and Ephraim / Northern Israel), it is also heard by the people of Jerusalem—but as a whole it is not addressed to them.

The burden / oracle of Cush / Ethiopia in **Isaiah 18:1-7** is addressed first to an unnamed nation and people beyond the rivers of Ethiopia—not to Jerusalem and its people! Then it addresses the entire world—all humanity, beginning in **verse 3**. It depicts a grape-harvest that YHWH is helping to produce, which will result in that unnamed nation and people bringing a gift to YHWH, to Mount Zion. But this hardly means that the burden / oracle was addressed to Jerusalem and its people!

The burden / oracle of Egypt in **Isaiah 19:1-25** includes Israel in its message, but the message has to do with Egypt and its future—one of judgment and blessing. In

(continued...)

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<sup>60</sup>(...continued)

**verse 11** the wise counselors of Egypt are addressed in the second person, and then in **verse 12** Egypt itself is addressed in the second person. Then in **verses 13-25**, the message returns to the third person, speaking of what the future holds in store for Egypt—both in terms of smiting and blessing. YHWH will smite Egypt, and then hear her cry for healing, and bless her. Egypt will turn to YHWH and join with Assyria in YHWH's worship. Israel is mentioned in the third person—she will be a third, united with Egypt and Assyria in worshipping YHWH!

We think Watts is simply mistaken in holding that **chapters 18-19** are addressed to Jerusalem and its leaders, not to Egypt. What do you think? Is the prophet really speaking to his own nation, not to the unnamed nation and people beyond Ethiopia, and to the people of Egypt?

**Isaiah chapter 20** is not entitled a burden / oracle, but rather depicts a strange acted out message of the prophet Isaiah concerning Assyria's victorious conquering of both Egypt and Ethiopia. It is at the close of this chapter that mention is made of Egypt and Ethiopia's not being trustworthy—Oswalt's theme that he has inserted into other burdens / oracles as their basic meaning—but which none of them so much as mention.

The burden / oracle of “the wilderness of the sea” (a code-name for Babylon) in **Isaiah 21:1-10** is obviously concerned with Babylon, and its fall—but the message is addressed to YHWH's “threshed and winnowed one,” Israel.

The burden / oracle of Dumah / Edom in **Isaiah 21:11-12** depicts a voice calling to a watchman, who responds to the call. There is nothing about Jerusalem being addressed.

The burden / oracle of Arabia in **Isaiah 21:13-17** addresses a word of YHWH to the “caravans of Dedanites, inhabitants of Tema.” There is no address to Jerusalem and its leaders.

The burden / oracle of “the valley of vision” (a code name for Jerusalem) in **Isaiah 22:1-25** is, we believe, addressed to the people of Jerusalem and its leaders, a word of judgment and prediction of destruction, with Shebna and Eliakim being personally addressed with the prediction of their fall.

The burden / oracle of Tyre in **Isaiah 23:1-18** is addressed to the merchants from all around the Mediterranean who have traded with Tyre, and to Tyre itself, announcing her fall, as YHWH has purposed. But it includes a message of hope for Tyre after 70 years, when she will return to her trade / prostitution, but now in the service of YHWH and His people! There is no mention of Jerusalem and its leaders being addressed.

What is obvious to us is that the burdens / oracles are separate messages

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<sup>60</sup>(...continued)

addressed to many different people and nations, including Jerusalem and its leaders—and we think it is a mistake to think of all them as really addressed to Jerusalem.

It is also, we think, a mistake to think of them as bearing the same message, such as “you can’t put your trust in this people and nation,” as Oswalt has implied.

Rather, the burdens / oracles are distinct, each one with its peculiar addressees and messages. YHWH (and therefore His prophet) has a message for Israel, yes. But He also has messages for other nations and peoples. He knows their conditions, He feels their pain; He speaks words of judgment, but also words of consolation and hope—especially for Egypt and Assyria, Israel’s long-time enemies—who will both one day serve YHWH side by side with Israel, as this **nineteenth chapter** goes on to predict. What do you think?

<sup>61</sup>Kaiser comments on **verses 13-15**, “But their passive inability to discern the will of Yahweh is not all; as in **Isaiah 3:12**, they lead their people astray, because by sending a particular spirit (compare **1 Kings 22:20-23**; **2 Kings 19:7**; **Job 12:24-25**) Yahweh has cast confusion into their minds (compare **Isaiah 29:9-10**). As a result their proposals paralyze the will of their people, who thus become completely incapable of action...The aimlessness of their action is dramatically compared with the behavior of a drunken man who staggers round helplessly in his vomit. (Compare **Isaiah 28:7-8**.)

“**Verse 15** briefly sums up what has been said in the statement that Egypt will consequently no longer be capable of any common action which includes the whole nation.” (Pp. 103-04)

Alexander translates / comments on **verse 13**: “*Infatuated are the chiefs of Zoan, deceived are the chiefs of Noph, and they have misled Egypt, the corner (or corner-stone) of her tribes.*” (P. 354)

Translations of the last half of **verse 13** vary:

**King James**, “they have also seduced Egypt, *even they that are* the stay of the tribes thereof.”

**Tanakh**, “Egypt has been led astray By the chiefs of her tribes.”

**New Revised Standard**, “those who are the cornerstones of its tribes have led Egypt astray.”

**New International**, “the cornerstones of her peoples have led Egypt astray.”

**New Jerusalem**, “the top men of her provinces have led Egypt astray.”

**Rahfs** translates **verse 13** by καὶ πλανήσουσιν Αἴγυπτον κατὰ φυλάς, “and they will lead Egypt astray (tribe) by tribe.”

(continued...)

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<sup>61</sup>(...continued)

Oswalt comments that “The tragedy of Egypt’s situation is that the very ones who should have led her correctly have led her astray. Here the officials of the other great city of Lower Egypt, Memphis, are also called to shoulder the blame. These people were the very cornerstone of Egyptian society, but if the cornerstone itself has no foundation, it cannot support anything else...

“Wisdom which is limited to this world is as short-sighted and confused as a person lost in a dense forest. Unless there is an overall perspective from outside this world from which to analyze and evaluate human experience, then no course of action makes any ultimate sense...

“This is why the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.” (P. 371) See:

**Proverbs 1:7**

Fear of / reverence for YHWH—beginning of knowledge;  
Wisdom and discipline / correction, foolish people despised.

**Psalm 111:10,**

Beginning / first (רֵאשִׁית) of wisdom—fear of / reverence for YHWH;  
good insight / prudence (will belong) to all doing them (wisdom’s teachings)  
its praise stands to the perpetuity.

**Proverbs 9:10,**

A beginning (תְּחִלָּה) of wisdom—fear of / reverence for YHWH;  
and knowledge of set-apart things—understanding.

Oswalt continues: “It is also why there is no other foundation than Christ;

**1 Corinthians 3:11,**

For another foundation no one is able to lay,  
beside the one having been laid,  
which is Jesus Christ.

**Ephesians 2:20,** where Christian believers are described as:

having been built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets,  
Christ Jesus himself its cornerstone / capstone.

(continued...)

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<sup>61</sup>(...continued)

**1 Peter 2:6,**

Because it is contained in writing,  
Look, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone, chosen, precious;  
and the one believe in / upon it will not be put to shame!

**Isaiah 28:16,**

Therefore in this way my Lord YHWH spoke:  
Look—He founded in Zion a stone,  
a stone of testing,  
a precious cornerstone,  
a foundation of a foundation--  
the one believing / trusting will not be in haste!

“Without Him [God, or Jesus Christ] as the unifying factor in all existence, existence is a tale ‘full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.’” (Pp. 371-72)

We agree with Oswalt. While we would affirm that Oswalt’s translation (along with that of others) has overstated the case, holding that the Egyptian wise men were “nothing but fools,” it is clear that Egypt’s leaders had no real knowledge of God the Creator of all nations and people, or of the powerful teaching, made known to Israel and its prophets—teachings and truth fulfilled and embodied in Jesus Christ and the message that emanated from him.

We recognize the human element and the many problems it raises in interpretation of the **Bible**—both Hebrew and Greek. But with that recognition, we also find that the biblical writers speak with a compelling authority throughout their

messages, that call their readers / hearers to live in a world-view with God and His will for human life at its center. Sometimes they give their message as nothing less than God’s message; sometimes it is obvious that it is their own voice, or the voice of others that is speaking. Sometimes we cannot agree with their statements, limited and human as they are. But still, their messages are given with compelling authority, calling those who hear to build their lives on faith in, and obedience to God—the only solid foundation for life.

For one example, think of the **Book of Esther**, which is an ancient story of a Jewish heroine—a story that in its Hebrew original doesn’t mention God even one time [its Greek translation, with its many additions to the Hebrew text, more than makes up for that deficiency]. Nonetheless, without even mentioning God, the **Book of Esther** is a ringing call to live in terms of God’s world, and His call to His people to build their lives on Divine teaching.

There both can be, and is ethical teaching and practical guidance for various

(continued...)

נְשֵׂאוֹ שְׂרֵי נֹף

הִתְעוּ אֶת-מִצְרַיִם

פְּנַת שְׁבֻטֶיהָ:

Princes of Zoan<sup>62</sup> acted foolishly;

princes of Noph<sup>63</sup>, <sup>3</sup>, <sup>4</sup> were beguiled.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>61</sup>(...continued)

areas of life—to be found in the wisdom of Egypt (and elsewhere, for example, especially in the philosophers of Greece). But the deep, life-transforming teachings of Moses and the prophets, rooted in their faith in the Creator God of all the earth, as those teachings are embodied and fulfilled in Jesus Christ, calling hearers to the one God of all the earth, and to His will for self-giving love for all humanity—cannot be found in the writings of those teachers of wisdom—whether in Egypt or in Greece. And without that foundation, that cornerstone, true guidance and hope for all of life, we believe, cannot be found.

The Egyptians, who in their history had witnessed the exodus of Israel from their midst, and who lived as next-door neighbors to Israel, could easily have learned from Israel, hearing the messages addressed to them by Israel’s prophets such as Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, learning the dynamic teaching of the Ten Commandments, etc., etc. But no—they were not interested, they were not seeking to know this Creator God YHWH of Israel. They were content with their own religion, with their long-time traditions, and they turned a deaf ear to Israel and her prophets. And we say with Isaiah, that the refusal to seek for, and listen to the Creator God is truly foolish.

<sup>62</sup>Slotki comments that “Zoan” was synonymous with “Egypt,” and is so used in the **Hebrew Bible**. “Zoan or Tanis occupies an important place in Egyptian history and dates back, according to some authorities, to the time of the sixth dynasty [about 2325-2150 B.C.E.]. Situated on the right bank of the Tanitic arm of the Nile, it was the seat of the Hyskos kings.” (P. 90)

The “right bank” of a river is the bank of the river on the right facing downstream.

<sup>63</sup>Slotki comments that Noph was “Memphis, situated on the left bank of the Nile, near Cairo. It was the famous capital of Lower Egypt and a center of learning and religion. In **Hosea 9:6** the name is spelled Moph; in Egyptian it is Mnoph.” (P. 99)

The “left bank” of a river is the bank of the river on the left facing downstream.

Watts comments that “*Noph* is Memphis (or On or Heliopolis), at the head of the Delta, which often served as Egypt’s northern capital [see our end-note 3; and see on

(continued...)

They led Egypt astray,  
cornerstone(s) / chief(s) of her tribes.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>63</sup>(...continued)

the Internet, 'maps of ancient Egypt']. Pianchi conquered Memphis in 728 B.C.E. But then he withdrew to Napata [see our end-note 4; and see on the Internet, 'maps of ancient Nubia']. It remained for his brother Shabaka to control it effectively from 715 B.C.E. onward. The chiefs of her tribes emphasizes the splintered nature of Egypt in this time—a far cry from the proud and powerful unity of other days [but not at all the conditions being described in **chapter 19!**].

“Kitchen’s descriptions (**The Third Intermediate Period**, pp. 348-77) of the twenty-second, twenty-third, twenty-fourth, and twenty-fifth dynasties shows that in 715 B.C.E. there were four pharaohs in Egypt claiming the throne...Osorkon IV ruled in Tanis (the eastern Delta), the last of the Bubastide or twenty-second Dynasty. Shoshenk VI was presumably in Leontopolis (the central Delta), the last of the twenty-third Dynasty. Bokchoris ruled in Sais (the western Delta), as the last of the twenty-fourth Dynasty. Breasted writes of knowing the names of at least eighteen kings or princes who ruled Delta cities in that time (**History of Egypt**, p. 536). Shabaka was just assuming the throne in Napata (upper Nile). He would take control of Egypt within the year.” (Pp. 254-55)

For an **Encyclopedia Britannica** article on Memphis, see our end-note 3.

Gray states that “Memphis occupied a site at the southern end of the Delta, about 10 miles south of Cairo. Till the 18<sup>th</sup> dynasty (about 1580-1350 B.C.E.) Memphis was the most important place in Egypt; at that time it yielded first place to Thebes, but maintained undisputed claim to be the second city of the Empire. Stormed by the Ethiopians in the 8<sup>th</sup> century, by the Assyrians in the 7<sup>th</sup>, by Cambyses in the 6<sup>th</sup>, it does not appear to have suffered any considerable depopulation, and, outliving Thebes, continued to be populous under the Ptolemies and second only to Alexandria.” (Pp. 329-30)

Thebes was located over 200 miles to the south of Memphis—upstream on the Nile.

<sup>64</sup>The two Hebrew verbs in these first two lines of **verse 13**, נִזְאַלּוּ, “they acted foolishly,” and נִשְׁאַרּוּ, “they were beguiled,” are spelled differently by 1QIs<sup>a</sup>, נִזְאַלּוּ and נִשְׁאַרּוּ. We do not understand what this difference in spelling means, or whether it is just a mistake in spelling by the Qumran copyist.

<sup>65</sup>Slotki states that Noph / Memphis is called “cornerstone of her tribes” because

(continued...)



<sup>65</sup>(...continued)

of “the heads / rulers” who lived there; the “tribes” were “the castes or nomes in which the Egyptian population was classified.” (P. 90)

Gray states that the noun פִּנָּה is literally “a cornerstone.” He comments that “The phrase is best taken as subject of the sentence and synonymous with princes in the preceding line.” (P. 330)

Watts notes that both the Syriac and Aramaic translations have the plural, implying a Hebrew text with פִּנּוֹת, “cornerstones of,” or “chiefs of.” Compare **Judges 20:2** and **1 Samuel 14:38**. (P. 251)

<sup>66</sup>Watts comments on **verses 14-15** that “Egypt (the Delta kings) seems to have no discernible policy to meet the Assyrian threat and seems to be blind to the rising power of Ethiopia. The [**Book of Isaiah**] suggests that even ‘the folly of man may serve the purpose of God’ (Clements, p. 179)...

“God has waited for things to develop (‘for the harvest to ripen,’ **Isaiah 17:5**). Now He moves toward His goals. Kitchen (**The Third Intermediate Period**, p. 333, note 75) believes **chapter 19** belongs to this period (716 B.C.E.) just before Shabaka has assumed control.” (P. 255)

Instead of saying “God has waited...”, we suggest that it is wiser to say that “Isaiah’s view is that God has waited...”

Oswalt comments on **verses 14-15** that “This situation of confusion in Egypt is not accidental. It is the Lord Who has confounded all the brilliance and wisdom of that culture [Oswalt here admits there was ‘brilliance and wisdom’ in Egypt], just as He confounded the language of a people set upon Deifying themselves (**Genesis 11:1-9**, [the story of the Tower of Babel]). Having refused to know God as He is, having warped the relation of Creator and creation, they are now doomed to see all other relationships through a distorted lens. This is not an arbitrary judgment on God’s part, but it is from Him in that it is a part of His plan of cause and effect that a false premise will affect the outcome of all premises dependent upon it (**Roman 1:18-32**).

“The metaphor of proud Egypt wandering unsteadily back and forth through the vomit of drunkenness is a biting one, but it had been increasingly so from about 1200 B.C.E. onward. When the New Kingdom ended, there were no more periods of greatness for the Nile Valley culture. It first broke in two along the ancient lines of valley and delta. Then it was dominated by a whole series of foreign conquerors of whom the Ethiopians in Isaiah’s time were the latest, but not the last [but were those ‘periods of greatness’ any less periods of wandering drunkenness, with human leaders claiming to be Divine, with no real understanding of, or obedience to, the one Creator

(continued...)

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<sup>66</sup>(...continued)  
God?]....

“Egypt is like an ancient whore who does not know that her beauty is gone. In that light it does not come as a surprise that Ezekiel’s words a century later are even more severe than Isaiah’s (**Ezekiel 29:6, 7** [Egypt a broken, unsteady reed to lean on—is that even more severe?]). Both prophets were horrified even to think that Judah might compromise her faith in the Almighty, all-caring God for such a patently false hope as conniving, drunken Egypt.” (P. 372)

Yes...but Oswalt does not mention that Ezekiel likewise accused Jerusalem of being even a worse whore than her sister cities of Samaria and Sodom—see the compelling allegory of Jerusalem as YHWH’s daughter and bride who turned from YHWH and His love to unprecedented whoredom in **Ezekiel 16**. It is a passage so vivid in its condemnation of Jerusalem that official Judaism refused to allow the passage to be read in Jewish synagogues! **Isaiah 1**, with its condemnation of Israel’s religion, is no less powerful!

And with this in mind, it is obvious that the condemnation of Egypt’s leadership is not a nationalistic condemnation, but one that applies even more powerfully to Israel itself, with its supposed knowledge of YHWH. The Creator God of all the earth, YHWH, must be known and recognized as Who He truly is. He is calling all people and nations, including Israel, to Himself—to come to Him, to worship Him, and to live by His loving will for all creation, to seek His wisdom, and refuse to pretend ourselves as “wise”!

Alexander translates **verse 14**: “*Jehovah hath mingled in the midst of her a spirit of confusion, and they have misled Egypt in all its work, like the misleading of a drunkard in his vomit.*”

He comments that “This verse describes the folly before mentioned as the effect not of natural causes or of accident, but of a [Divine] judicial infliction...Spirit here means a supernatural influence.” (P. 354)

Gray comments on **verse 14** that “Yahweh is the cause of the folly that precedes the fall of Egypt. He allows a spirit to possess them that distorts their judgment...These [leaders] with judgment warped, so that they see nothing right, lead the whole nation to its doom.” (P. 330)

He translates the phrase רֵיחַ עֲוֹנוֹתָם by “the spirit of distortion,” and compares “the spirit of deep sleep” (**Isaiah 29:10**), “the spirit of falsehood” in the prophets of Yahweh (**1 Kings 22:23**), and “the evil spirit” that terrified Saul (**1 Samuel 16:14**), “all alike performing Yahweh’s purpose...In all that they undertake, the Egyptians have no more power to go straight than a drunken man.” (P. 330)

(continued...)

וְהִתְעוּ אֶת-מִצְרַיִם בְּכָל-מַעֲשֵׂהוּ

כְּהִתְעוֹת שָׁכוֹר בְּקִיאָו:

YHWH poured out into her [Egypt's]<sup>67</sup> midst a spirit of confusion,<sup>68</sup>

and they caused Egypt to go astray in all its work–

like a drunkard is caused to go astray in his vomit!

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<sup>66</sup>(...continued)

Motyer states that “The poem opened as the Lord approached Egypt. Now, He is at work within the leaders, imparting a spirit of dizziness or bewilderment / dithering [hesitation]. The word **עִוְעִים** occurs only here...The idea...is of leaders ‘not knowing which way to turn.’ Such is one aspect of the holy, judgmental activity of the Lord (**1 Kings 22:21-23; 2 Thessalonians 2:11**).” (P. 166) But again we note how difficult it is to determine the exact meaning of a word that occurs only once in the **Hebrew Bible**.

Does all of this seem harsh and strange to you? Look back at the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and World War II. Both Hitler and Stalin as youths had the possibility of knowing and serving God—but both of them rejected that possibility, and chose atheism instead. And where did their refusal to know God lead them? Both of them can be compared to drunken men, wandering in their drunkenness, murdering millions upon millions. A visit to the Holocaust Memorial in Jerusalem will convince you of the reality of Hitler’s madness; Aleksandr Isayevich Solzhenitsyn’s **Gulag Archipelago** will convince you of Stalin’s madness. It was a cunning, fox-like madness that knew no moral or religious bounds.

<sup>67</sup>Where our Hebrew text has the phrase **בְּקִרְבָּהּ**, “in her midst,” **Rahlfs** has the plural pronoun  $\alpha\upsilon\tau\omicron\iota\varsigma$ , “in them.”

<sup>68</sup>Slotki’s translation of the Hebrew **עִוְעִים** is “(a spirit of) dizziness.” He mentions that some translate by “perverseness,” but states that “the root-meaning is ‘distortion’; the mind cannot think clearly.” (P. 90) **Brown-Driver-Briggs** gives the meaning as “distorting,” “warping,” and suggests translation by “temper of distorting.”

Oswalt translates by “(a spirit of) distortion,” and notes that “a ‘spirit’ here refers to an attitude or way of approach.” (P. 366)

Instead of our Hebrew text’s **עִוְעִים**, 1QIs<sup>a</sup> spells **עוועיים**, but we do not understand the difference in meaning, and think it might just be a mistake by the Qumran copyist.

19:15<sup>69</sup> וְלֹא־יִהְיֶה לְמִצְרַיִם מַעֲשֵׂה

אֲשֶׁר יַעֲשֶׂה רֵאשׁ וְזַנֵּב

כַּפֵּה וְאַגְמוֹן:

And there will not be for Egypt a product,  
which head and tail will make,  
branch and reed!<sup>70</sup>

19:16<sup>71</sup> בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא יִהְיֶה מִצְרַיִם כְּנָשִׁים

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<sup>69</sup>Slotki comments on **verse 15** that “The chaotic character of the country will prevent concrete or fruitful action on the part of any of its citizens.” (P. 91)

Alexander translates **verse 15**: “*And there shall not be to Egypt a work which head and tail, branch and rush, may do.*” He comments that “The figures of head and tail, branch and rush, are used as in **Isaiah 9:13**, to denote all classes of society, or rather the extremes between which the others are included.” (P. 355)

<sup>70</sup>Slotki comments that “head and tail” and “branch and reed” are “metaphors for members of different ranks of society.” (P. 91) Compare **Isaiah 9:13**<sup>Heb</sup> / **14**<sup>Eng</sup>, where closely similar metaphors are used.

Gray states that **verse 15** “expresses awkwardly much the same idea [as **verse 14**]: neither high nor low (**Isaiah 9:13**) will achieve anything.” (P. 330)

**Rahfs** translates the phrase here in **19:14** by κεφαλὴν καὶ οὐρανὸν ἀρχὴν καὶ τέλος, “head and tail, beginning and end.”

<sup>71</sup>Oswalt entitles **verses 16-25** “Egypt will come to Judah.”

We simply do not understand how such a title can be given to these verses, which say nothing concerning Egypt coming to Judah, but rather depict Egypt being terrified by Judah, and some cities in Egypt speaking Hebrew, and swearing allegiance to YHWH. They depict YHWH hearing Egypt’s cry and sending them a deliverer, making Himself known to the Egyptians, who will know and worship Him, and they depict YHWH healing Egypt. They depict a highway between Egypt and Assyria, with the Egyptians joining in worship with the Assyrians, and the three nations, Egypt, Assyria and Israel being acknowledged by YHWH as equally related to YHWH. But “Judah coming to Egypt”?

Ortland, much more appropriately, entitles these verses “Egypt, Assyria, Israel Blessed.” Kaiser entitles them “The Conversion of Egypt.” Motyer entitles them “The

(continued...)

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<sup>71</sup>(...continued)  
healing of Egypt.”

Motyer comments that “The apparently unrelenting opposition of the Lord to Egypt in the foregoing poem [implying that these verses are a separate poem from **verses 1-15**; however, these verses begin with the phrase “in that day,” identifying what is to be described as happening in the same time as the predicted devastations of Egypt in **verses 1-15**] stands in a wonderful contrast to the present passage on the restoration of Egypt and its gathering into the people of God. The conjunction of ‘smiting’ and ‘healing,’ which provides titles for the two sections, appears in **verse 22**. We have seen the one side of Divine action; here is the other...

“Egypt stands for the Gentile world, heading into irreversible decline...But Divine opposition is not the last word; alongside the world’s problem (**verses 1-15**) the prophet places the Lord’s solution (**verses 16-25**). It is a point-by-point reply, couched in five ‘In that day’ oracles:

Smiting ( <b>verses 1-15</b> )	Healing ( <b>verses 16-25</b> )
The fear of the Lord ( <b>verse 1</b> )	The fear of the Lord ( <b>verses 16-17</b> )
Confusion, disunity ( <b>verse 2</b> )	One language, one Lord ( <b>verse 18</b> )
	Reconciliation ( <b>verses 19-22</b> )
Consulting the no-Gods ( <b>verse 3</b> )	Crying to the Lord ( <b>verse 20</b> )
A fierce king ( <b>verse 4</b> )	The healing Lord ( <b>verse 22</b> )
	Harmony in worship ( <b>verse 23</b> )
The Nile dried in judgment ( <b>verse 5</b> )	Highway for unity...( <b>verse 23</b> )
	Co-equality in the Lord ( <b>verses 24-25</b> )
A spirit of bewilderment ( <b>verse 14</b> )	Divine blessing (P. 167)

But where in the text is anything said about “Egypt standing for the Gentile world”? Motyer is reading this into the text.

Kaiser comments on **verses 16-24** that “The prophecy of judgment against Egypt, **19:1-15**, written at the earliest in the course of the fourth century [400-301 B.C.E.], was later added to five times...A mere punishment of Egypt [mere?] is changed into a visitation which brings about its conversion to Yahweh. The conversion is brought about by the salvation of the Jewish diaspora [where is anything said about ‘the Jewish diaspora’?] by a savior whom Yahweh has sent. The fourth addition in **verse 23** was not content with this, and states that in the future there will be relations between Egypt and Assyria, who will worship Yahweh in common. A final hand in **verses 24-25** adds the attractive thought of a people of God which now includes Israel, Egypt and Assyria. **19:16-24** should be dated in third or early second century B.C.E.” (P. 105)

(continued...)

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<sup>71</sup>(...continued)

Kaiser is very certain about the various dates that he assigns to different sections of the text, and about which parts of the text should be assigned to Isaiah and which parts should be attributed to later authors. The reader of Alexander's commentary quickly learns how German biblical scholars in the nineteenth century engaged endlessly in this same kind of speculation concerning the text which Kaiser continued in the second half of the twentieth century.

But all of these matters are highly subjective, and speculative in nature, and different commentators on **Isaiah**, starting with similar assumptions, reach very different conclusions. We are much more interested in seeking to determine what the text says in its final, canonical form, as it has come down to us, without engaging in this kind of endless speculation.

Kaiser entitles **verses 16-17** "Egypt under the terror of God."

He comments that "With the favorite formula of introduction for eschatological interpolations [we say it is a favorite formula for Isaiah in speaking of the envisioned future—see footnote 72], 'in that day,' which is used by all the additions in this chapter, the redactor loosely attaches his message to **verses 1-15**. Here 'that day' is meant to be the day in which Yahweh will come to Egypt and which will bring the beginning of everything proclaimed in the foregoing prophecy. Under the pressure of the blows from Yahweh which fall upon the land and the people, the Egyptians will be completely demoralized...

"Possibly the author of **verses 16-17** supposed that at the sight of the drying up of the Nile waters the Egyptians would be reminded of the plagues of Egypt in the past or even of the miracles of the exodus...and would conclude that Yahweh was also at work in the visitations they were now suffering. Thus they might anxiously ask whether they were to face another Passover night." (Pp. 105-06)

Perhaps...but nothing is said in the text concerning the exodus or passover.

Slotki comments on **verses 16-17** that "Egypt will be in terror of the Lord of Hosts and of His people in the land of Judah." (P. 91)

Gray entitles **verses 16-17** "Judah a terror to Egypt."

He comments that "Egypt will tremble at the impending judgment of Yahweh, and will shudder at the mere mention of the land of Judah." (P. 331)

Oswalt comments on **verses 16-17** that "The identification of the cause for Egypt's terror...is that God Whose seat of rule is on the territory (אֶרֶץ יְהוָה, 'ground, soil')

(continued...)

## וְחָרְדוּ וּפָחַד מִפְּנֵי תְּנוּפֹת יְרֵיחוֹהָ צְבָאוֹת

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<sup>71</sup>(...continued)

of Judah [this is Oswalt's view, but the text says nothing about where God's 'seat of rule' is located]. Thus these verses make the theme of the section plain at the outset: Egypt will look to Judah, at first fearfully, but then more confidently, rather than the opposite being true.

“This fearful looking is another expression of what is a fundamental truth to Isaiah: repentance and healing come through retribution [punishment] and judgment (**verse 22; chapters 1-5; 6:10-13; 17:7-11; 42:18-43:7; 59:1-21**). Those who have not experienced the result of their sin are very likely to deny that they have any sin. But those who are crushed will be looking for a redeemer, and Isaiah promises exactly that. It is not that punishment somehow ‘pays’ for the sin.” (P. 375)

Oswalt easily states that punishment does not somehow “pay” for the sin. But that is to deny the ringing message of **Isaiah 40:2**,

Speak to Jerusalem's heart,  
and cry out to her,  
that her warfare is complete,  
that her iniquity / guilt was accepted / forgiven,  
that she received from YHWH's hand double (punishment)  
for all her sins!

Oswalt himself in his comment on **40:2** states that ““All three phrases suggest completeness: service [our ‘warfare’]—fulfilled; iniquity—atoned for; sin—paid in full... Israel has suffered immensely for her sins, but now it is complete; she need fear nothing more from God's hand.” (**Volume II**, p. 50)

Watts comments on **verses 16-17** that “Against the divided princedoms even Judah's force was a threat. But this is only true as Yahweh acts through Judah. And that depends on Judah's cooperation with God's plan, i.e., being willing to work with Assyria and Ethiopia (**Isaiah 19:2** [which says nothing of the sort!]). In such a day (literally ‘in that day’) points back to **19:1** when Yahweh rides the clouds in Egypt, the day when His plan matures (**18:4-6**).” (P. 255)

Alexander translates **verse 16**: “In that day shall Egypt be like women, and shall fear and tremble from before the shaking of the hand of Jehovah of hosts, which He (is) shaking over it.” He comments that “The reference is not to the slaughter of Sennacherib's army, but more generally to the indications of Divine displeasure.” (P. 355)

## אֲשֶׁר-הוּא מִנִּיף עָלֵינוּ:

On that day<sup>72</sup> Egyptians<sup>73</sup> will be like the women,<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>72</sup>This phrase, **בְּיוֹם הַהוּא**, “On that day,” occurs over 200 times in the **Hebrew Bible**, oftentimes referring to the current day in which something is happening, sometimes being translated by “that same day.” Sometimes it refers to a future day, when something will happen that has just been predicted, but hardly “in the far-distant future.”. Sometimes it only means “in the future,” but also sometimes it refers to a day in the past. All of this is true from **Genesis** through **Ecclesiastes**.

But beginning with the **Book of Isaiah**, and continuing through the prophets of Israel, there is a notable change in usage, as this phrase becomes a standard phrase for pointing to the future, to the Day of YHWH, and to the time of “the good things coming,” although in **Isaiah, chapter 22** it refers to a time in the past. The phrase occurs some 45 times in **Isaiah**, at

**Isaiah 2:11, 17, 20; 3:7, 18; 4:1, 2**, the day of YHWH, a coming time of judgment and blessing;

**Isaiah 5:30**, a coming day of judgment on Israel, YHWH’s vineyard;

**Isaiah 7:18, 20, 21, 23**, a coming day when destruction comes on Israel from Assyria and Egypt;

**Isaiah 10:20, 27**, a coming day following the Assyrian invasion, when a remnant will return to Israel;

**Isaiah 11:10, 11; 12:1, 4** a coming day when the “Root of Jesse” stands as a signal to the nations, Israel’s remnant returns for a second time, and thanksgiving is given to YHWH;

**Isaiah 17:4, 7, 9**, a coming day for Damascus, when Jacob’s glory will be brought low, humanity will look to its Maker, and strong cities will be deserted;

**Isaiah 19:16, 18, 19, 21, 23** and **24**, a coming time when Egypt will tremble, five cities in Egypt will speak Hebrew and swear allegiance to YHWH; an altar to YHWH will be build in Egypt’s midst, and a pillar to YHWH will be erected at Egypt’s border; YHWH will be known by the Egyptians and they will worship YHWH; YHWH will strike the Egyptians, but then hear their cry and heal them; there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria, and the Assyrians will come into Egypt, and Egypt into Assyria; Egyptians will worship together with Assyrians; Israel will be a third with Egypt and Assyria, as all three nations share equally in their

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<sup>72</sup>(...continued)

relationship with YHWH.

**Isaiah 20:6**, a coming day when inhabitants of the coastlands realize those in whom they had placed their hopes had failed them;

**Isaiah 22:8, 12, 20 and 25**, a day in the past, when Jerusalem looked to her weapons and her preparations for war to save her, when YHWH called for mourning, but the Jews celebrated, preparing to die; a day that is coming when Eliakim will take Shebna's place; but also a day when Eliakim also shall fall.

**Isaiah 23:15**, a coming day when Tyre will be forgotten for seventy years.

**Isaiah 24:21**, a coming day, when YHWH's punishment is visited on both the army of heaven and kings of earth.

**Isaiah 25:9**, a coming day when YHWH has provided a great feast for all peoples, and swallowed up death forever, wiping away all tears, and worship will be given to YHWH, for whom the peoples have waited.

**Isaiah 26:1**, on that coming day, a song of triumphant praise will go up to YHWH in the land of Judah.

**Isaiah 27:1, 2, 12, 13**, in that day (we often say "In the good times coming") YHWH will punish Leviathan, the fleeing serpent, and slay the dragon that is in the sea; a song will be sung about YHWH vineyard that He protects; it will be a time of harvest and gleaning; it will hear the sound of a great trumpet calling all of God's people to return from Assyria and Egypt.

**Isaiah 28:5**, in the coming day, YHWH will be crown of glory for the remnant of His people.

**Isaiah 29:18**, in that coming day, the deaf shall hear and the blind shall see.

**Isaiah 30:23**, that coming day will be one of great agricultural plenty.

**Isaiah 31:7**, in that coming day, everyone will throw away their idol-Gods.

**Isaiah 52:6**, in that coming day, YHWH's people will know His name and know that it is He, speaking to them.

Reading all of these passages impresses us with the "visionary" nature of Isaiah's message [which in **Isaiah 1:1** is called **יְשַׁעְיָהוּ חִזְוֹן**, "Vision of Isaiah." He truly "stands on tiptoe," looking out into the future that YHWH is bringing for the entire

(continued...)

and it will tremble, and it will be in dread,<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>72</sup>(...continued)

world—including judgment upon the wicked, and wondrous blessings for Israel and all peoples! His messages depict all people and nations under the rule of, and responsible to, the one God; his messages call everyone to repentance, including first of all, Israel; but those messages are filled with hope for a wonderful future that YHWH is bringing to pass, not only for Israel but also for the entirety of humanity!

You cannot read Isaiah’s message without recognizing humanity’s deep need for repentance, for turning human hearts and lives over to YHWH and His purpose; but you also cannot read Isaiah’s message without beginning to share in his optimistic vision of the future blessedness that awaits all who unite their lives with YHWH! Isaiah’s vision is a God-centered world-view, that both brings judgment to, and offers hope to the world, including Israel’s long-time enemies! The vision is not exact, or without ambiguity. Indeed, Isaiah message is filled with enigma—with puzzle, with riddle. But what a vision of hope it is! What a contrast to the hopeless future depicted by so many atheists!

<sup>73</sup>Where our Hebrew text has no definite article, **Rahlf**s interpolates the article, οἱ Αἰγύπτιοι, “the Egyptians.” Watts notes that “The Hebrew uses a collective sense [for the noun] and a singular verb.” (P. 254)

<sup>74</sup>Slotki states that this means “weak and timid.” We ask, Is this a “male chauvinist” statement by Isaiah, or is it Slotki’s comment that is “male chauvinist”? Or, Is it both? We remember the Judge Deborah who led the armies of Israel, and the stories of Judith in the **Apocrypha**, which depict Judith as a brave, self-sacrificing widow-warrior risking her life in order to deliver the Israelites. From the Greeks, we remember the Amazons, famous for their Scythian, central Eurasian female warriors, with their female warrior Goddess Ape.

The fact is that women have oftentimes taken leadership in wars across the centuries—consider Joan of Arc, the young warrior heroine proclaimed a saint by the Roman Catholic Church. If Isaiah means all women are weak and timid, he is certainly overstating the facts of history.

Watts comments that “The general comparison to women trembling is unique in the **Old Testament**. Often a woman in childbirth is so pictured...The women are not identified. They seem to be civilian non-participants who can only tremble at the thought of the developing battle.” (P. 255)

<sup>75</sup>Oswalt notes that in the phrase here, וַיִּפְתָּר | וַיִּחַדַּח, **wecharadh uphachadh**, “and it will tremble, and it will be in dread,” there is obvious assonance—repetition of sounds—and “the two verbs convey one thought.” (P. 372) 1QIs<sup>a</sup> has both of these

(continued...)

from before YHWH of Armies' waving hand,  
which He is waving (synonym)<sup>76</sup> over it!<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>75</sup>(...continued)

verbs in the plural, וַחֲרָדוּ וּפְחָדוּ, **wecharadhu weuphachadhu**, “and they will tremble, and they will be in dread.”

<sup>76</sup>1QIs<sup>a</sup> interpolates the phrase יָדוֹ, “His hand” at this point in the text, to make it very clear whose “hand” is meant.

<sup>77</sup>The phrase מִפְּנֵי תְנוּפַת יַד־יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת אֲשֶׁר־הוּא מְנִיף עָלֵינוּ, our “from before YHWH of Armies' waving hand, which He is waving (synonym) over it!” is given varying translations:

**King James**, “because of the shaking of the hand of the LORD of hosts, which he shaketh over it.”

**Tanakh**, “because the LORD of Hosts will raise His hand against them.”

**New Revised Standard**, “before the hand that the LORD of hosts raises against them.”

**New International**, “at the uplifted hand that the LORD Almighty raises against them.”

**New Jerusalem**, “at the threatening hand of Yahweh Sabaoth, when he raises it against her.”

**Rahlf**, ἀπὸ προσώπου τῆς χειρὸς κυρίου σαβαωθ ἦν αὐτοὺς ἐπιβαλεῖ αὐτοῖς, “from face of the Lord Sabaoth's hand which He will lay / put on them”;

Slotki comments that this means shaking the hand “to strike (Egypt) down.” (P. 91)

Oswalt notes that תְּנוּפָה, “‘upraised,’ may be also translated with ‘swinging’ or ‘waving over.’ It implies a threat (**Isaiah 10:32; 11:15; 30:32**).” (P. 372)

Watts holds that יַד־תְּנוּפַת, “(The) waving hand,” “recalls the cultic waving of sacrifices ‘before Yahweh’ to dedicate them to Him (compare **Exodus 29:24**)...The waving hand is also a reminder of the plagues against Egypt and of the open way through the Sea of Reeds. The verses picture Egypt's dread when they recognize that Yahweh is directing the battle (‘waving His hand’); compare **Isaiah 5:25; 9:12, 17, 21; 10:4** against them.” (P. 255)

Oswalt states that “The hand of God upraised against Egypt simply immobilizes them. They are no longer warriors standing up against long odds. They are women

come upon suddenly, who know themselves to be defenseless, cowering in fear before the inevitable. Isaiah, with the faith of a believer, is confident that it is his God alone Who is responsible for the blows which Egypt is going to experience in the coming

(continued...)

19:17<sup>78</sup> וְהִיְתָה אֲדָמַת יְהוּדָה לְמִצְרַיִם לְחִגָּא

כֹּל אֲשֶׁר יִזְכִּיר אֶתְּךָ אֵלָיו יִפְחָד

מִפְּנֵי עֲצַת יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת

אֲשֶׁר-הוּא יוֹעֵץ עָלָיו:

And the land of Judah<sup>79</sup> will become a reeling<sup>80</sup> for Egypt;

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<sup>77</sup>(...continued)

years. And all those blows will be in keeping with God's plans (**10:6; 14:24; 46:10**).

“As Israel had been a source of horror to the Egyptians hundreds of years earlier (**Exodus 10:7; 12:33**), so now Judah will be also.

“The question inevitably arises whether Isaiah expected literal fulfillment of these words. If so, has it occurred, or is it yet to be? Alexander's answer from 140 years ago still seems the most judicious. He maintained that the prophet was speaking in a primarily metaphorical vein to establish the primacy of Judah over Egypt. This interpretation seems more and more likely as the section unfolds.” (Pp. 375-76) See our footnote 24.

<sup>78</sup>Alexander translates / comments on **verse 17**: “*And the land of Judah shall be for a terror (or become a terror) unto Egypt, every person to whom one mentions it (or every one who recalls it to his own mind) shall fear before the purpose of Jehovah of Hosts, which He is purposing against it...*This verse relates, not to the destruction of Sennacherib's army in Judah, nor to the approach of the Assyrians from that quarter [from Judah], nor to an attack upon Egypt by Judah itself, but to the new feelings which would be entertained by the Egyptians towards the God of the Jews and the true religion. Judah, in a political and military sense, might still appear contemptible; but in another aspect, and for other reasons, it would be an object of respect and even fear to the Egyptians.” (P. 355)

<sup>79</sup>Slotki comments that “the land of Judah” means “the inhabitants of Judea.” But he adds that “Others take *land* literally. The Egyptians being in terror of the Lord (**verse 16**), the land of Judah, which is His dwelling-place, also becomes a terror to them.” (P. 91) Compare footnote 71.

<sup>80</sup>The Hebrew phrase לְחִגָּא occurs only here in the **Hebrew Bible**. **Brown-Driver-Briggs** defines it as meaning “for a reeling (an Aramaism for חֲגָה), translating this verse by “and the land of Judah *shall become to Egypt a reeling*, i.e. Egypt shall reel in terror at the sight of it (parallel to יִפְחָד; this meaning may either be from an

(continued...)

everyone who is caused to remember it, will fear Him,<sup>81</sup>  
from before YHWH of Armies' counsel / purpose,  
which He is counseling / purposing concerning it.

19:18<sup>82, 5, 6</sup> בְּיוֹם הַהוּא יִהְיֶה חֲמִשׁ עָרִים בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם מִדְּבָרוֹת שִׁפְתַּי כְּנֹעַן

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<sup>80</sup>(...continued)

original sense of חֲגִג, or mean “be excited as at a חֲגִג,” a pilgrimage festival.

Translations vary, from “a terror” to “the dread,” to “shame,” to εἰς φόβητρον, “for a terror,” to the Latin Vulgate’s *erit in festivitatem*, “will be in festival mood.” Again we note that when a word occurs only once in the **Hebrew Bible**, it is very difficult, if not impossible, to determine its exact meaning.

<sup>81</sup>Slotki’s translation has “whenever one maketh mention thereof to it; it shall be afraid.” He suggests the translation “everyone to whom mention is made thereof shall be afraid,” with “everyone” meaning “every Egyptian.” (P. 91)

Oswalt: “The phrase is literally ‘every one who makes her remembered unto him, he will fear.’ The ‘her’ refers to Judah and the ‘he’ of the final verb is Egypt.” (P. 372)

Again we note the puzzling nature of Isaiah’s prophetic vision / message!

<sup>82</sup>Gray entitles **verses 18-25** “Jewish Colonies in Egypt. The Conversion of Egypt. The Triple Alliance of Egypt, Assyria, and Israel.”

He comments that The unity of the section has been questioned, **verse 18** or **18b** or **23-25** having been by various writers suspected of being interpolations...But...it is by no means difficult to interpret the several parts as coherent...

“The determination of [the date of writing of the passage] rests in the first place on the question whether the entire section is prophecy, or whether it is in part history clothed as prophecy. In the former case it seems easier to account for the prophecy of an altar (or rather in this case altars), and a *matstsebah* or *matstsebahs* to be erected in Egypt (**verse 19**) before the publication of **Deuteronomy (chapter 12; 16:22)** than after; though the idea is not easily associated with pre-exilic prophecy...

“If the reference is to a particular altar and *matstsebah* already existing, no known facts explain the reference to *matstsebah*, and the only known fact which might explain the allusion to the altar is the temple at Leontopolis erected about 160 B.C.E. (An historical reference to both the erection and destruction of this temple given in the form of prophecy is found in **Sibylline Oracles v. 488-510**) [see our end-note 6]...

“It is altogether improbable that the exiled high priest Onias had no sympathizers in Judah. And it is possible that one of these, dealing not with an idea, but accepting

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<sup>82</sup>(...continued)

the fact of a temple in Egypt, saw in its erection the realization of what had long ago been pre-determined by Yahweh as a means of bringing Egypt to Himself. What those, who had driven Onias to Egypt, had intended for evil, God had intended for good, to bring much people to Himself (compare **Genesis 50:20**)." (Pp. 332-33)

And with this, Kaiser dates this passage in Isaiah some time after 160 B.C.E., making this part of Isaiah later than the translation of the **Hebrew Bible** into Greek, and perhaps even later than the Dead Sea Scrolls, including 1QIs<sup>a</sup>, both of which contain this passage. We say, such a dating "is altogether improbable."

Watts entitles **verses 18-25** "Worship of Yahweh in Egypt."

Alexander translates / comments on **verse 18**: "*In that day there shall be five cities in the land of Egypt speaking the lip (i.e. language) of Canaan, and swearing to Jehovah of hosts. The city of destruction shall be said to be one (i.e. shall one be called)...*

"*In that day*, according to prophetic usage, is a somewhat indefinite expression, and may either mean during or after the distresses just described." (P. 356)

He adds that "Of all the explanations of the...text, the simplest is the one proposed by Calvin, which supposes the whole verse to mean that for one town which shall perish in unbelief, five shall profess the true faith and swear fealty [loyalty, fidelity] to Jehovah. The simplicity of this interpretation, and its strict agreement with a general tenor of the passage as a prophetic picture of great changes in the State of Egypt, serve at the same time to commend the common reading as the true one." (Pp. 359)

We are always suspicious when commentators appeal to the "general tenor of a passage" rather than to its actual words. All sorts of theological ideas can be read into a passage on this basis, even though the text does not actually contain them. We think there is very little basis for Calvin's interpretation of this passage, just as we are suspicious of Alexander's belief that the "simplest explanation" is the true one. All too often simple explanations overlook and disregard evidence that supports other, more complicated explanations. We say, Simple does not mean true.

Gray entitles **verse 18** "The 'City of Righteousness' in Egypt."

He comments that "There will be five cities in Egypt speaking Hebrew and acknowledging Yahweh. One of these will be distinguished from the rest, possibly as being the legitimate seat of Jewish worship in Egypt. In this case the reference would be to Leontopolis, where from about 160 B.C.E to 73 C.E. there stood a temple built by the Jewish refugee Onias IV, after the model of the temple at Jerusalem (Josephus, **Antiquities of the Jews**, xiii.3 [in our edition, 13:62-64] **The Jewish War** i.x.1, vii.10 2-4 [in our edition, I:33; VII:421-436]). See our end-note 5 for these quotations.

(continued...)

וְנִשְׁבְּעוֹת לַיהוָה צְבָאוֹת

עִיר הַהָרִס יֹאמֵר לְאַחַת:

In that day there will be five cities<sup>83, 7</sup> in Egypt-land speaking Canaan's tongue / language<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>82</sup>(...continued)

“The specific reference to Leontopolis, or the temple of Onias, has been recognized alike by many who see in this verse a prophecy written in the 8<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E., and by many who regard it as a piece of history clothed in the form of prophecy, and forming the prelude to actual prophecy in **verses 20-25**.” (Pp. 333-34)

Oswalt comments on **verse 18**: “In this verse the writer begins to speak of an Egyptian turn to God, presumably as a result of the outworking of God's plan upon them. How often persons whose comfortable world has come crashing down around them turn to God in desperation and find, almost to their surprise, that He had been waiting to receive them. So Isaiah pictures Egypt's turning to God.” (P. 376)

<sup>83</sup>Slotki holds that “five cities” is “a round figure signifying an indefinite number.” (P. 91) Perhaps...but does “five” sound like a “round figure” to you?

Alexander states that there are three interpretations of the number five...

“Some understand it [like Slotki] as “a round or indefinite number, meaning few or many...Thus understood, the sense is simply that *a number of cities* shall do so and so.

“Another interpretation “understands the words as denoting five, and neither more nor less...

“A third interpretation understands the words as expressive not of absolute number but proportion; five out of the twenty thousand cities which Herodotus says Egypt contained...

“[Calvin's interpretation is] five out of six...*five* [cities] professing the true religion to *one* rejecting it...What appears to be meant is that five-sixths, i.e. a very large proportion, shall profess the true religion, while the remaining sixth persists in unbelief.” (P. 356-57) Alexander agrees with Calvin. See the preceding footnote.

Perhaps...but the text is not at all that clear. The text can be understood as meaning one of the five cities speaking Hebrew and swearing to YHWH will be called “The City of Destruction.” And once again we note the lack of clarity, and the puzzling nature of the prophetic message, that leads to differing interpretations...

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<sup>83</sup>(...continued)

Gray comments on the phrase “five cities,” that “the writer may well mean five definite cities, though these need not necessarily be Heliopolis, Leontopolis, Migdol, Daphnae, Memphis...

“Others treat *five* as a round number, so that the meaning is among the 18,000 to 30,000 cities of townships of Egypt, as they were computed at different times...*a few cities* will speak Hebrew. [But, Gray states,] the use of any number is *unnecessary*, unless five were meant strictly.”

Gray adds that “In another respect affecting the general sense of the verse, interpreters have differed. Some see here a prophecy that a few Egyptian cities, as the firstfruits of the whole land (**verses 24-25**), will become converted to the Jewish religion, and in proof of their conversion speak Hebrew...Others, with greater probability, understand the five cities to be Jewish colonies in Egypt.” (P. 334)

Watts comments that “Jews were in Egypt from early times, probably from Solomon’s time on (compare **1 Kings 14:25-28** and **2 Chronicles 12:1-9** [neither of which says anything about Jews being in Egypt] )...Lists of Jews / Israelites to be returned to Israel regularly mention Egypt (compare **Isaiah 11:11** [yes]...**Obadiah 20** [no])...The letters found in Elephantine (modern Aswan) witness to a strong community of mercenaries...They also testify to the presence of Aramaic in Egypt in the fifth century B.C.E.” (P. 258) See our end-note 7.

Oswalt proposes that “Isaiah, seeking to convey the idea that Egypt must come to Judah’s God, uses the figure of the five cities to convey the radical nature of the turn. To think of even one city adopting the language of the ‘sand-dwellers,’ the Semites, whom the Egyptians held in contempt (compare ‘The Tale of Sinuhe’ in Pritchard’s **Ancient Near-Eastern Texts**, pp. 18-22), would be astonishing. But for five to do so, and especially if one is the center of the worship of the Egyptian Sun-God Re...would be truly amazing...

“So Isaiah says that Egypt’s turn to God will be so complete that some cities will go so far as to adopt even the language of Judah. Whether we ought to expect this event to come to pass in a literal way then becomes secondary to the major concern: will Egypt one day turn to God in a radical way? To that we may answer a resounding yes!” (P. 377)

In this way, Oswalt avoids the question of the fulfillment of this prediction. Christian interpreters commonly search through the **Hebrew Bible**, latching on to what they consider predictions of Jesus Christ, and devote much time and energy to showing how those predictions have all been fulfilled. We have often heard in Bible Belt America the claim that “every prophecy in the **Bible** has been fulfilled!” But passages such as this, which have not found fulfillment, are either avoided, or not taken as serious, literal predictions, or are “skirted around” as Oswalt has done here.

(continued...)



and swearing loyalty to<sup>85</sup> the YHWH of Armies.

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<sup>83</sup>(...continued)

Our view is that interpreters have all too often expected far too much from Israel's prophets. They are powerful spokespersons for the world-view that has God at its center—they constantly speak of God, and call their hearers to repentance and obedience to the Divine call as they understand it. But when they make predictions, they can only speak in terms of their visions, which oftentimes are vague, unclear, inexact and puzzling (exactly as YHWH describes in **Numbers 12:6-8**, and as Paul states in **1 Corinthians 13:9-12**). Their predictions are enigmatic, and ambiguous—and we deceive ourselves when we pretend that they are not. This passage in **Isaiah 19:18-25** is a classic example.

<sup>84</sup>Slotki comments that “the (tongue) language of Canaan” means “Hebrew.” He states that “The reference is either to Egyptians who were converted to the worship of God [meaning YHWH, instead of the many different Egyptian Gods] and adopted Hebrew as their language, or to Jewish settlements in Egypt.” (P. 91) While Slotki is certain the reference is to Hebrew, we suspect that the language may well be Aramaic, the language used by the Jewish colony at Elephantine—see end-note 7.

Gray states that the Hebrew language is meant. “The five cities will be Hebrew-speaking; Hebrew, not Egyptian, Greek (or? Aramaic) will be in these cities the regular language of intercourse...Yet why this is not expressed by *speaking Jewish*, as in **Isaiah 37:11** (compare **Isaiah 36:13**), is not clear, and is, indeed, strange, for in **Nehemiah 13:24** Ashdodite and Jewish (i.e. Hebrew), though both languages of Canaan, are sharply distinguished.” (P. 334)

Oswalt comments on the phrase שְׂפַת כְּנַעַן, “lip / speech of Canaan,” that “Although the adjective ‘Canaanite’ is often used in a negative way in the **Bible**, it is clearly not negative here. Moreover, the description is linguistically correct, as Hebrew is but one dialect of that branch of Northwest Semitic which included Ugaritic, Phoenician, Edomite, and Moabite (and now perhaps Eblaite?), all of which may be called ‘Canaanite.’” (P. 373)

<sup>85</sup>Oswalt notes that the phrase וְנִשְׁבַּעְתָּ לַיהוָה צְבָאוֹת, should be translated “and swearing (loyalty) to the YHWH of Hosts,” since the niph'al participle לְנִשְׁבַּע, “to swear to,” means “to take an oath of allegiance, as opposed to merely swearing that something is true.” (P. 373)

Watts quotes Wildberger that “‘to swear by’ someone in Hebrew is בְּנִשְׁבַּע... However, the reading לְנִשְׁבַּע appears in **Isaiah 45:23** and **2 Chronicles 15:14** with the meaning ‘to enter a relationship by an oath.’” (P. 257)

The City of the Destruction<sup>86</sup> it will be called to one.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>86</sup>Slotki holds that “the city of destruction” means “the city of idolatry.” He states that “This is in agreement with the reading of the consonantal text (עִיר הַהָרָס). Many Hebrew manuscripts [Alexander says sixteen manuscripts and several editions of the **Hebrew Bible**; now, 1QIs<sup>a</sup>] read ‘city of the sun’ (עִיר הַחֶרֶס), i.e. Heliopolis, one of the oldest, if not the oldest, of the cities of Egypt, situated near the southern end of the Nile Delta. It has been suggested that the name was given this form (*City of Destruction*) as a mark of contempt, in the same way that Bethel [‘House of God’] was called Beth-aven (‘House of Iniquity’)—compare **Hosea 4:15** and **Amos 5:5**.” (P. 91)

For this phrase, **Rahlfs** has πόλις-ασεδεκ, in which we think the second word is a transliteration of a Hebrew word converted into a Greek word, preceded by an “alpha-privative”--“City of No Righteousness,” an apt translation for “City of Destruction.” Alexander understands this Greek phrase to mean “City Of The Righteousness,” placing a rough breathing over the *aleph* in the transliterated word: πόλις ἄσεδεκ, הַצֶּדֶק, but we think this is highly speculative, even though agreed to by many.

Oswalt comments, “That Jerusalem is called ‘the city of righteousness’ in **Isaiah 1:26** has led some commentators to suggest that the author was claiming that one of the five cities would be an Egyptian ‘Jerusalem.’ Since there was a Jewish temple at Leontopolis in the late inter-testamental [late post-exilic] period [for Protestants, the period between **Malachi** and **Matthew**], some have speculated that this temple gave rise to the statement originally, and that the priests in Jerusalem replaced ‘righteousness’ with ‘destruction’...It seems more likely that [**Rahlfs**] represents an alteration of the original by Egyptian Jews who wished to aggrandize their own situation.” (P. 378)

Pauli’s translation of the Aramaic Targum of Isaiah reads “The city of Beth-shemesh [‘House of (the) Sun’], which is to be destroyed, shall be called one of them.”

Watts concludes that “The consensus of interpretation is that it does refer to Heliopolis in Egypt which is often called אֵוֶן or אֵן in the **Old Testament** (we find only **Genesis 41:45, 50; 46:20**; hardly ‘often’] but which in **Jeremiah 43:13** is called בֵּית שֶׁמֶשׁ, **Beth Shemesh**, “House of (the) Sun.”

Slotki observes that “Josephus...records that Onias IV, who built a Jewish temple at Leontopolis, about 154 B.C.E., appealed to this text [**Isaiah 19:18**] in support of the validity of his enterprise, which was bitterly opposed in Jerusalem as being contrary to the Mosaic legislation.” (Pp. 91-92) See our end-note 5.

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<sup>87</sup>The Masoretic Hebrew has לְעֵד, “for a witness,” “for a testimony”; but **Rahlfs** translates by εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα, which is a translation of לְעֵד, “to perpetuity”—which has the same consonants but different pointing by the Masoretes.

Gray comments that “One of these five cities will be distinguished from the rest by its peculiar character or function. The idiom ‘to be called’ (לְאָמַר, **Isaiah 4:3; 32:5; 72:4**; compare **1:26**), expresses an actual quality possessed, or function exercised, not a mere name to express which a different idiom would be used (**Genesis 10:25; Exodus 1:15; 18:3; Numbers 11:16; Ruth 1:4; 2 Samuel 4:2**)...

“Unfortunately, what this city was to be called is uncertain. There are various readings, and the interpretation of the variants is ambiguous. But the context...allows us to affirm (1) that the name must be of favorable import; (2) that it must not be merely the actual name of the city...but to indicate some essential peculiarity of this one city; (3) the name must not by implication speak unfavorably of the other four, for they, as well as it, are obviously cities of Yahweh’s approval [but we do not see how the context allows these three affirmations; can you?].

“The readings, with the most probable translation attached in each case are as follows:

- (1) πόλις-ασεδεκ [**Rahlfs**] (variant ασεδ ἡλιου) = עִיר הַצְדִּיק, (**Isaiah 1:20**), City of Righteousness. [But is ασεδεκ a transliteration of ‘the righteousness,’ or a transliteration of ‘righteousness’ with an alpha-privative prefixed, meaning ‘no righteousness’?]
- (2) עִיר הַהָרָס, City of Destruction. So most Hebrew manuscripts...But this might also = עִיר הַחֶרֶס, City of the Sun...
- (3) עִיר הַחֶרֶס, City of the Sun. So, some Hebrew manuscripts and others.

“The oldest attestation, that of [**Rahlfs**], say about 150 B.C.E., is in favor of (1); but the readings (2) and (3) both go back at least to the 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> century C.E. If any of these readings be the original one, the choice lies between (1) and (3), and must really fall on (1)—City of Righteousness. The name recalls **Isaiah 1:26** [meaning, according to Gray, City of Right Worship], and means that one of these cities will be the Egyptian Jerusalem...Thus interpreted the name satisfied all the conditions of the context—it is of favorable import, it is not an actual proper name, it does not by implication reflect on the other cities. Only one of them could be the Egyptian Jerusalem, the city of correct worship [and] all of them might have been cities of righteousness in any wider sense of that term.” (P. 335) We say, Perhaps...but this is highly speculative.

(continued...)

<sup>87</sup>(...continued)

Gray adds that “It is certain [from Josephus—see our end-note 5] that **verse 19** and the neighboring verses were early understood to refer to the temple at Leontopolis, and that his temple provoked the displeasure of the Palestinian Jews. Some Palestinian scribe substituted for a reading agreeable to the context a reading that expressed his feelings with regard to the schismatic temple. The reading of a few manuscripts, עִיר הַתְּחָרָם, City (Devoted to) the Destruction), if it had any serious claims to consideration, would be dismissed on the same grounds.” (P. 336)

<sup>88</sup>Gray entitles **verses 19-22** “An altar and a *matstsebah* will be erected to Yahweh in Egypt (**verse 19**).”

He comments that the purpose of erecting an altar and a pillar is that of “reminding [Yahweh] that He has worshipers there...When, therefore, His Jewish worshipers (scarcely His Egyptian worshipers)...are oppressed and cry to Him, He will send and deliver them (**verse 20**); He will, thereafter, make Himself known to the Egyptians, and they, coming to know Him, will also serve Him with sacrifice and offering, and pay their vows to Him (**verse 21**). Thence forward, being Yahweh’s worshipers (and people, **verse 25**), Yahweh will treat them as He had treated Israel in the past, smiting them, indeed, to discipline them, but also, and as often as they turn to Him, hearing their prayer and healing them.

“Since it is only after the erection of the altar to Yahweh (**verse 19**) that the Egyptians come to know Yahweh (**verse 21**), the writer cannot mean that the Egyptians themselves erected this altar; he thinks of aliens resident in Egypt, that is, Jews (compare **verse 18**).” (P. 337) Again we say, Perhaps...but the text is not that clear.

Oswalt comments on **verses 19-22** that “The third announcement is the longest and it goes further still in expressing the depth of the future relationship between God and Egypt. One cannot escape the impression that certain highly emotive terms, ones intimately connected with Hebrew religion, are consciously applied to Egypt here in an effort to show how completely Egypt will come to Israel’s God.” (P. 379)

Motyer entitles **verses 19-22** “Reconciliation,” and comments that “What began to be true in the case of the five cities will come to be true of the whole, from *the heart* / ‘the middle’ to *its border*. Reciprocity [the practice of exchanging things with others for mutual benefit, especially privileges granted by one country or organization to another] of relationship is the keynote: prayer finds a response (**verse 20**); revelation leads to acknowledgment, worship and fidelity (**verse 21**); Divine discipline leads to repentance (*they will turn to the Lord*) and plea is answered in healing (**verse 22**)...

“There are five marks of true religion:

(continued...)

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<sup>88</sup>(...continued)

- (1) The altar...As well as being a place of sacrifice and therefore of the reconciliation of the sinner to the holy God, this altar was [will be] *a sign and witness*...[as the altar of **Joshua 22** was a witness to the reality of the Israelites who remained on the east side of the Jordan's] of their membership of Israel...so [the altar] will be for the Gentiles, symbolized here by Egypt.
- (2) Prayer...The Egyptians are to be brought into living fellowship with the Lord and find that prayer is the effective way of dealing with life's problems, however 'real.'
- (3) Revelation. The Lord will reveal Himself and, as a result, they...'will know the Lord' (**verse 21a**). True religion is not people searching for God but people responding to revealed truth [this is Motyers' theology—not stated by the text. We say humble searching for God is certainly an element of true religion].
- (4) Service. This will have both public expression (sacrifices and grain offerings) and personal commitment (they will make vows...and keep them) (**verse 21b**).
- (5) Providential discipline. Those whom He loves He chastens (**Proverbs 3:12**). So **verse 22** is literally 'And the Lord will smite Egypt, smiting and healing.'" (P. 169)

Watts comments on **verses 19-22** that "The usual [direction of] movement in God's future is...toward a return to Palestine or Jerusalem (**Isaiah 10:21; 11:11-16; 14:1-2**, etc.). But here in **chapter 19** the [direction of] movement is away [from Israel, and] toward Egypt. The political influence movement from Judah to Egypt (**verses 16-17**), the cultural influence through language (**verse 18**), and now the religious effect of submission to Yahweh are unmistakable. This is the most positive interpretation of the outward flow of population from Israel in the **Old Testament** (comparable only to the **New Testament's** commissions in **Matthew 28:19-20** and **Acts 1:8**)..."

"An altar implies sacrifice and a priesthood...It is a public symbol. A pillar or *matstsebah* is a usual sign beside a 'high place' in Canaan. Both are to be clearly dedicated *to Yahweh*. This is the point: the worship of Yahweh in Egypt will be open and official. They are both to be a *sign* and a *witness* to Yahweh in Egypt (**verse 20**). Yahweh will reveal Himself to Egypt and Egypt will *know Yahweh* (**verse 21**)..."

"A more complete statement of the full mutual relation of Yahweh and Egypt cannot be imagined. That relation includes answered prayers (**verses 20-22**) and a whole range of worship (**verse 21**). Yahweh will do saving acts for them. He will send a savior in times of oppression, as He did for Israel in the judges (**verse 20**). He will respond to repentance and prayer in times of distress (**verse 22**).

"Most comment on these verses has sought a historical correspondence...But that misses the point. Historical fulfillment here, like historical fulfillment in each of the five 'in that day' passages *did not occur*. The political decisions taken by Jerusalem's

(continued...)

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<sup>88</sup>(...continued)

government in the years between 716 and 714 B.C.E. prevented that (see **Isaiah chapters 20-22**). This vision, like that of **chapters 11-12**, shows God's view of the potential. The [**Book of Isaiah**] puts God's view side by side with man's failure to see, hear, or understand and his determination to have his own way—even when that brought disaster.

“The thought of an altar and a pillar to Yahweh in Egypt runs directly counter to the movement to concentrate worship, even in Palestine, to Jerusalem (or one place) only (compare **Deuteronomy**). Hezekiah participated in such a reform (**2 Kings 18:22 / Isaiah 36:7**). This culminated in Josiah's reform and destruction of high places throughout the land (**2 Kings 22; 2 Chronicles 34:33**) almost a century later. Ezra brought the process of concentrating sacrifice and worship in Jerusalem exclusively to completion (**Ezra-Nehemiah**)...**Deuteronomy 7:5; 12:3** and **Exodus 23:24** and **34:13** prohibit the raising of a *matstsebah* [pillar].” (Pp. 258-59)

We are thankful for Watts' honesty in this comment. Historical fulfillment of this prediction in **Isaiah 19** *did not occur!* And the movement of **Ezra-Nehemiah** to limit worship to one place, excluding foreigners, is not only contrary to this vision in **Isaiah 19** but is in direct conflict with the powerful theological teaching of **Isaiah 40-55**.

What do you think? Have you been taught that there are no mistakes, no contradictions in the **Bible**, and certainly no conflicts in the **Bible's** theology? And in that light, do you attempt to reconcile opposing theological views found in the **Bible**?

We hold that honest, open-minded study of the **Bible** will convince the student of the presence of deeply differing, competing theologies, which call upon the student to choose, to decide what he or she truly believes about God and His will. And we are convinced that this is not a bad thing at all, but enables the student to “enter the theological circle,” and ask for God's guidance, as the student strives to live out what is found in the **Bible**.

Kaiser entitles **verses 19-22** “The conversion of Egypt.”

He comments that “The universal expectations in this passage are reminiscent of **Zephaniah 2:11** and **3:9b-10**...By sending to His faithful, oppressed by the Egyptians, as it were a second Moses to be a savior and to conquer the oppressors, He will impart to the Egyptians the certainty that Yahweh is God, so that they are converted to Him.” (P. 108)

**Zephaniah 2:11,**

Made fearsome (was) YHWH over them,  
because He made all Gods of the land / earth lean.

(continued...)

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<sup>88</sup>(...continued)

And they will bow down to Him, each one from his place—  
all islands / coastlands of the nations!

**Zephaniah 3:9-10,**

- 9 Because then I will return to peoples a pure language,  
to call—all of them—on YHWH's name,  
to serve Him (with) one shoulder.
- 10 from beyond Ethiopia's rivers,  
My worshipers, daughter of My scattering,  
shall bring along My gift / offering. (See **Isaiah 18:1, 7**)

Kaiser says this passage in **Isaiah 19** is reminiscent of these verses in **Zephaniah**. We say Zephaniah may well be basing his language on that of **Isaiah 19**.

Alexander translates / comments on **verse 19**: “In that day there shall be an altar to Jehovah in the midst of the land of Egypt, and a pillar at (or near) its border to Jehovah...

“It has been disputed whether we are here to understand an altar for sacrifice, or an altar to serve as a memorial (**Joshua 22:26-27**). It has also been disputed whether the prohibition of altars and consecrated pillars (**Leviticus 26:1; Deuteronomy 12:5; 17:22**) was applicable only to the Jews or to Palestine, leaving foreign Jews or proselytes at liberty to rear these sacred structures as the Patriarchs did of old (**Genesis 28:18; 35:14**)...

“The necessity of answering these questions is removed by a just view of the passage, as predicting the prevalence of the true religion and the practice of its rites, in language borrowed from the Mosaic or rather from the patriarchal institutions. As we might now speak of a missionary *pitching his tent* at Hebron or at Shechem, without intending to describe the precise form of his habitation, so the prophet represents the converts to...the true faith as erecting an altar and a pillar to the Lord in Egypt, as Abraham and Jacob did of old in Canaan...

“Those explanations of the verse which suppose the altar and the pillar, or the center and border of the land, to be contrasted, are equally at variance with good taste and the usage of the language, which continually separates in parallel clauses, words and things which the reader is expected to combine...The altar in the midst of the land, and the pillar at its border, denote altars and pillars through [the whole land's] extent.” (Pp. 359-60)

We think this is an example of Alexander's theology--with its view of an infallible **Bible**, teaching one true religion with no real differences, no opposing theologies--which influences his interpretation of this verse, causing him to understand the text's depiction

(continued...)

## וּמִצֵּבֶה אֶצֶל-גְּבוּלָהּ לַיהוָה:

In that day there will be an altar<sup>89</sup> to the YHWH in (the) midst of Egypt-land,

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<sup>88</sup>(...continued)

of an altar and a pillar in the Land of Egypt as only figurative language that should not be taken literally, since it would be a contradiction to the “one altar” law of **Deuteronomy 12:5-6, 13-14**, and its forbidding of “pillars’ (**Deuteronomy 16:22**).

But for those who recognize the human element in the biblical documents, including conflicting theological teachings--as in the sharp contradiction between the program of legalistic racial segregation set forth by **Ezra-Nehemiah** and the program of non-legalistic inclusion set forth by this passage, **Isaiah 19**, and **Isaiah 40-55**--this ceases to be a problem, and the text can be understood, not as prophetic prediction consisting of metaphors, or figurative language, but as the prophetic prediction of worship of YHWH coming to Egypt, with an altar and a pillar dedicated to YHWH in the midst and at the border of the land of Egypt, exactly as it says. What do you think?

Oswalt comments on **verse 19**: “There will be found in Egypt an *altar* and a memorial *pillar* dedicated to Yahweh...This terminology has provided comparisons to the situation at Leontopolis [see end-note 8] (but also at Elephantine where a Jewish temple existed about 410 B.C.E. [see end-note 7]). However, the passage as a whole is not talking about Jewish behavior in Egypt but about Egyptian behavior...

“When Abraham wished to express his gratitude and allegiance, he built an altar (**Genesis 12:8**), and when Jacob wished to formalize his acceptance of God’s covenant-offer, he set up a pillar (**Genesis 28:22**; later in Israel’s history the pillars, like the bronze serpent, became so thoroughly associated with pagan religion that they were banned--**Deuteronomy 16:22**; **2 Kings 17:10**)...

“But as a symbol of dedication to God it was still a useful figure. So too Egypt will express gratitude to God and enter into covenant with Him, not necessarily by building altars and pillars, but in ways appropriate to the day and time when the turning takes place. The placing of the pillar on the border would be a way of saying that the trip to Egypt would no longer mean leaving the holy land and entering a profane one. The pillar would declare that Egypt was God’s land too.” (P. 379)

In this way Oswalt avoids the prediction’s depiction of something unlawful according to **Deuteronomy** being done by YHWH’s worshipers in Egypt, saying that the altar and pillar of the prediction are not mean literally, but are only figures of speech taken from the patriarchal period of Israel’s history. If that is indeed what Isaiah meant, surely he would have expressed it in a different way!

<sup>89</sup>Slotki notes that the altar is an altar “for sacrifices.” (P. 92)

(continued...)



and a pillar<sup>90</sup> next to its border, for the YHWH.<sup>91, 8</sup>

19:20<sup>92</sup> וְהָיָה לְאוֹת וּלְעֵד לִיהוָה צְבָאוֹת בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם

<sup>89</sup>(...continued)

Gray states that “The altar, if not ideal and the subject of prophecy, but really existing at the time when these words were written, is most readily understood of the altar at Leontopolis. Leontopolis occupied the site of Tell-el-Yehudiyeh; this place has been excavated and the remains of the Jewish temple laid bare [by W.M. Flinders Petrie]. [It] lies north of Memphis, but at the southern end of the Delta, and therefore quite strictly *in the midst of the land*. It is certain that the priests of Leontopolis in the 1<sup>st</sup> century C.E. applied this passage to their temple. [See our end-note 5, with its quotations from Josephus; also see end-note 8 for Leontopolis]...

“An allusion to the altar and temple of the Jewish colony at Elephantine, built before 525 B.C.E., and destroyed in 411 B.C.E. [see end-note 7], has been suspected by Steuernagel ...But (1) Elephantine lay not ‘in the midst of the land,’ but on the southern frontier, as Ezekiel was well aware (**Ezekiel 30:6; 29:10**); (2) we have no evidence, and it is improbable, that Elephantine made any such claim to a distinctive position among Jewish cities in Egypt as is made [here in **Isaiah 19:18-20a**].” (P. 339)

<sup>90</sup>Gray comments that “the altar and the *matstsebah* [pillar] to which the writer refers were remote from one another, one being in the center, the other at the extremity of the country; and it is not necessary to assume that the *matstsebah* was one connected with an altar or with worship, and consequently an object such as the Deuteronomic Law condemned (**Deuteronomy 16:22**; compare **1 Kings 14:23; 2 Kings 127:10; 18:4; 23:14**)...As according to **Genesis 31:45** a *matstsebah* marked the boundary between the Arameans and Hebrews in Gilead, so according to this passage, a *matstsebah* is to mark, or rather already marks, the boundary of Egypt.” (P. 338)

Perhaps...but again this may be an attempt to avoid a conflict between this passage and the **Deuteronomy** law.

<sup>91</sup>Kaiser comments that “Since the memorial pillar and altar are meant to serve as signs to remind Yahweh of His community living there, and probably also as signs to manifest Yahweh to the Egyptians, they must have been set up by Jews who lived in Egypt.” (P. 108)

<sup>92</sup>Alexander translates **verse 20**: “*And it shall be for a sign and for a testimony to Jehovah of hosts in the land of Egypt, that they shall cry to Jehovah from the presence of oppressors, and He will send them a deliverer and a mighty one, and save them.*”

He comments that “We may understand the prophet to mean that when they cry *at the altar* of Jehovah, He will answer and deliver them, and thus the altar will bear witness to Him. But as nothing is said of crying at the altar, the other construction is to be preferred, which makes the hearing of their prayers, and their deliverance from suffering, the sign and witness in behalf of Jehovah...

(continued...)

כִּי־צִעֲקוּ אֶל־יְהוָה מִפְּנֵי לְחָצִים  
וַיִּשְׁלַח לָהֶם מוֹשִׁיעַ וְרַב וְהַצִּילֵם:

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<sup>92</sup>(...continued)

“Calvin and others...apply [the prediction of a deliverer and a mighty one] to Christ. Vitringa, laying stress upon the word [רַב] as meaning ‘great,’ regards it as a proof that the deliverer here mentioned was Alexander the Great, or his Egyptian successor Ptolemy, also called the Great, and by a singular coincidence, Soter or the Savior...The rabbinical opinion [is] that it means the angel who destroyed Sennacherib’s army...

“Even if the language of this verse by itself might seem to point to a particular deliverer, the comprehensive language of the context would forbid its reference to any such exclusively. If, as we have seen reason to believe, the chapter is a prophecy, not of a single event, but of a great progressive change to be wrought in the condition of Egypt by the introduction of the true religion, the promise of the verse before us must be, that when they cried God would send them a deliverer, a promise verified not once but often, not by Ptolemy or Alexander only, but by others, and in the highest sense by Christ himself...

“It is admitted that the rise of Alexander’s power was contemporaneous with a great increase of Jewish population and Jewish influence in Egypt, and also with a great improvement in the social and political condition of the people. This was still more remarkably the case when Christianity was introduced, and who shall say what is yet to be witnessed and experienced in Egypt under the influence of the same Gospel?...

“In the language of this verse there is an obvious allusion to the frequent statement in the **Book of Judges** that the people cried to God, and He raised them up deliverers who saved them from their oppressors (**Judges 2:16; 3:9**, etc.” (Pp. 360-61)

Oswalt comments on **verse 20** that “The turning of Egypt to God will be evidence that God has Himself turned to Egypt. Thus the One Who had smitten them becomes their deliverer [the text says, sends them a deliverer]. If the language of **verse 19** had overtones of **Genesis**, the language here is reminiscent of **Judges**. Just as the Hebrew people, crushed under oppressors unleashed by the Hebrews’ own sin, cried out for deliverance, so will Egypt. And just as God sent His champions in response to that cry, so He will do again...The point here seems to be that Egypt will experience God just as Israel did.” (P. 379) We agree with Oswalt.

And it<sup>93</sup> will be for a sign and for a witness to the YHWH of Armies in Egypt-land;<sup>94</sup>  
because they will cry out to YHWH from before oppressors;  
and He will sent forth<sup>95</sup> to them a deliverer and the contender,<sup>96</sup> and he will deliver them.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>93</sup>Slotki states that the “it” is referring to the altar. (P. 92)

<sup>94</sup>Gray comments that “The existence of the altar in the center and the *matstsebah*, or inscribed obelisk [stone pillar], on the frontier of Egypt, will serve Yahweh as reminders. For this kind of אֵימָת [‘sign’], unlike that in **Isaiah 7:14**, compare... **Genesis 9:11-16** [when God see the rainbow in the sky, He will remember the covenant He made with Noah and all flesh]...So when [Yahweh] sees the altar and *matstsebah* in Egypt, He [will be] reminded of His people there; and therefore (**19:20b**) *when they cry to Him because of oppressors (Judges 2:18), that He may send them a deliverer as of old (Judges 3:9, 18), He will intervene, literally contend, or conduct His case...and deliver them.*”

<sup>95</sup>Where our Hebrew text has וַיִּשְׁלַח, “and He sent forth” (assuming the *waw* is *waw-conversive / consecutive*), 1QIs<sup>a</sup> has וַשְׁלַח, “and He will send forth.”

<sup>96</sup>Where our Hebrew text has וַיִּרְדּוּ, “and the contender,” 1QIs<sup>a</sup> has וַיִּרְדּוּ, “and he came down / descended,” or “and he subdued.”

<sup>97</sup>Kaiser comments that “By sending to His faithful, oppressed by the Egyptians, as it were a second Moses be a savior and to conquer the oppressors, He will impart to the Egyptians the certainty that Yahweh is God, so that they are converted to Him.” (P. 108)

It has sometimes been suggested that the deliverer sent by YHWH was none other than Alexander the Great.

From **Wikipedia’s** article “History of Ancient Egypt” the following statement is taken:

“In 332 B.C.E. Alexander III of Macedon conquered Egypt with little resistance from the Persians. He was welcomed by the Egyptians as a deliverer. He visited Memphis, and went on a pilgrimage to the oracle of Amun at the Oasis of Siwa. The oracle declared him the son of Amun. He conciliated the Egyptians by the respect he showed for their religion, but he appointed Greeks to virtually all the senior posts in the country, and founded a new Greek city, Alexandria, to be the new capital. The wealth of Egypt could now be harnessed for Alexander's conquest of the rest of the Persian Empire. Early in 331 B.C.E. he was ready to depart, and led his forces away to Phoenicia. He left Cleomenes as the ruling nomarch to control Egypt in his absence. Alexander never returned to Egypt.” (9/10/2016)

<sup>98</sup>Alexander translates / comments on **verse 21**: “*And Jehovah shall be known to Egypt, and Egypt (or the Egyptians) shall know Jehovah in that day, and shall serve (with) sacrifice and offering, and shall vow a vow to Jehovah, and perform it.* This is not the prediction of a new event, but a repetition in another form of the preceding promise...

“What is first described as the knowledge of the true God, is afterwards represented as His service, the expressions being borrowed from the ancient ritual. If the last clause be literally understood, we must either regard it as an unfounded expectation of the prophet which was never fulfilled, or suppose that it relates to an express violation of the law of Moses, or assume that the ancient rites and forms are hereafter to be re-established...

“On the other hand, the figurative explanation is in perfect agreement with the usage of both testaments, and with the tenor of the prophecy itself. Bloody and unbloody sacrifice is here combined with vows, in order to express the totality of ritual services as a figure for those of a more spiritual nature.” (P. 361)

As we have repeatedly noted, Alexander’s creedal belief in an infallible **Bible** forces him to view this prophetic vision as meant figuratively, not literally. The prediction is only “borrowing language from the ancient ritual,” but cannot mean what it predicts literally, because if understood literally it would mean a violation of the law of Moses which demands all sacrifice to be offered in Jerusalem, not elsewhere. We must understand everything in terms of the “tenor” of the passage—the general or basic meaning, not the actual wording!

This is, to us, a sophisticated way to avoid the clear statements of the text. It seems absurd to us to comb through the biblical prophetic messages, weeding out anything that seems to be a violation of our understanding of **Deuteronomy** or **Leviticus**! What do you think?

Gray comments on **verse 21** that “By delivering His people in Egypt—whether because in delivering them He delivers the Egyptians also is not clear—Yahweh makes Himself known to the Egyptians (compare **Ezekiel 38:23**); but not merely with the result, on which Ezekiel lays so much stress, that they realize that Yahweh is Yahweh, i.e. realize all His might and power; this writer looks forward to a conversion of Egypt to the Jewish religion, which could be summed up as a ‘knowledge of Yahweh’...The converted Egyptians will give proof of their conversion by offering sacrifice to Yahweh; they will participate in the service of the altar (in Leontopolis?).” (P. 340)

Oswalt comments on **verse 21** that “Not only will the Egyptians worship God openly (**verses 18, 19**), not only will they experience God’s patience and mercy (**verse 20**), but they will come to that experiential knowledge of Him that is the ultimate goal of

(continued...)

וידעו מצרים את־יהוה ביום ההוא

ועבדו זבח ומנחה

ונדרו־נדר ליהוה ושלמו:

And YHWH will be known<sup>99</sup> to Egypt / Egyptians,<sup>100</sup>

and Egypt / Egyptians will know YHWH in that day;

and they will serve (with) sacrifice and offering;

and they will make a vow to the YHWH, and they will keep (it).<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>98</sup>(...continued)

all relationships with Him (**Jeremiah 9:23-25; Hosea 4:1; 13:4-5; Philippians 3:10; Isaiah 1:3; 43:10; 45:3; 60:16**)...

“The language here harks back to the exodus, when Egypt came to know Yahweh through bitter defeat (**Exodus 7:5; 9:28<sup>Heb</sup> / 29<sup>Eng</sup>; 14:4**; etc.). Now the knowledge will come through the positive aspects of experience with Him and will be expressed through the same means which Judah knows: ceremonial worship and obedience. This verse must be placed alongside **1:11-15** to get a full picture of Isaiah’s attitude towards ritual. When ritual is substituted for an ethically transformed life, it is devilish, but when ritual is an expression of that life, it is a beautiful thing...

“Thus Egypt is to be admitted to that select fellowship in which people are privileged to be able to commit their needs to God in faith and to have the marvelous experience of seeing Him meet those needs.” (P. 380)

<sup>99</sup>Slotki’s translation has “(And the Lord shall) make Himself known (to Egypt),” and Slotki comments that “The sufferings inflicted upon the Egyptians will be recognized by them as the act of God and induce in them a change of heart.” (P. 92)

<sup>100</sup>Somewhat strangely, the noun **מצרים** has a two-fold meaning. It is the name of the country, “Egypt” (used in this sense more than 500 times in the **Hebrew Bible**); but is also a plural noun that means “Egyptians” (used in this sense some 134 times in the **Hebrew Bible**). Oftentimes, it is difficult to know how to translate the noun, whether as referring to the country or to the people.

<sup>101</sup>Oswalt translates this last phrase by “and will perform it.” The verbal phrase here is **ושלמו**, literally, “and they will repay,” the piel meaning of **שלם**. He states that “The unpaid vow is incomplete; paying it completes it and puts it to rest.” (P. 373)

19:22<sup>102</sup> וַיִּגַּף יְהוָה אֶת־מִצְרַיִם נֶגֶף וּרְפוּאָה

וְשָׁבוּ עַד־יְהוָה

וַיִּנְעֲתוּ לָהֶם וּרְפָאוֹ:

And YHWH will strike Egyptians, striking and healing;<sup>103</sup>

and they will return as far as YHWH;

and He will be supplicated by them, and He will heal them.<sup>104</sup>

19:23<sup>105, 9</sup> בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא תִּהְיֶה מְסֻלָּה מִמִּצְרַיִם אֲשׁוּרָה

<sup>102</sup>Alexander translates / comments on **verse 22**: “*And Jehovah shall smite Egypt (or the Egyptians), smiting and healing, and they shall return unto Jehovah, and He shall be entreated of them, and shall heal them.* This verse may indeed be regarded as a recapitulation of the whole preceding prophecy, consisting as it does of an extended threatening (**verses 1-17**), followed by an ample promise (**verses 18-21**). As if he had said, Thus will God smite Egypt and then heal it. That great heathen power, with respect to which the Jews so often sinned both by undue confidence and undue dread, was to be broken and reduced. But in exchange for this political decline, and partly as a consequence of it, the Egyptians should experience benefits far greater than they before knew.” (P. 362)

Gray comments on **verse 22**: “[Having] become Yahweh’s people (compare **verse 25**), Egypt will experience the goodness of Yahweh’s which shows itself in Fatherly chastisement and ‘leads to repentance’ and healing.” (P. 340)

Oswalt states that “The relation between Egypt and Yahweh will be like that of parent and child. The Lord’s blows will be for healing, not destruction (**Hosea 6:1**). And Egypt may know His healing at any point, just as Israel may.” (P. 380)

<sup>103</sup>Slotki comments that “The chastisement will be disciplinary. It will last only while the people deviate from the right path. As soon as they return to the ways of morality they will be finally healed.” (P. 92)

<sup>104</sup>Kaiser comments that “For the present apocalyptic writer, Yahweh is the God Who listens not only to the lamentations of the people but also to those addressed to Him by other nations.” (P. 109)

<sup>105</sup>Gray entitles **verses 23-25** “The triple alliance of Egypt, Assyria, Israel.”

He comments that “These three powers, blessed of Yahweh, will be a source of blessing in the whole world...The conversion of Egypt, which must precede this, has been dwelt on in **verses 21-22**; that of Assyria is merely, but certainly, implied. The cooperation of Assyria and Egypt implies, too, a general state of peace which enters

(continued...)

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<sup>105</sup>(...continued)

into many a prophetic picture of the ideal future. What is remarkable here, and almost unparalleled, is the coordination of Egypt and Assyria with Israel; they are not to be subjects of Israel, and in virtue of so being, objects of Yahweh's regard. They are to be as directly related to Yahweh as Israel itself...

"This unlimited universalism, this entire elimination of racial prerogative to the favor of Yahweh, was too catholic a thought to be immediately and generally accepted...

"[The Greek translation, **Rahlfs**] misses the point of the equal coordination of the three nations by rendering in **verse 23** '*Egypt shall serve Assyria*,' and reduces **verse 25** to a mere reference to the Jews at home and in the diaspora, rendering '*Blessed is My people which is in Egypt, and which is in Assyria and the land, My inheritance, Israel.*'" (Pp. 340-41)

Slotki comments on **verses 23-25** that "Cordial relations will exist between Assyria and Egypt (*a highway*), who will be united with Israel in a triple alliance in the Kingdom of God culminating in universal blessing." (P. 92)

Oswalt comments on these three verses: "The fourth and fifth announcements climax the whole. In a remarkable statement Isaiah sees the ancient enmity between Assyria and Egypt dissolved. No more will Israel be merely a pawn between these warring powers. Now she will take her place beside them to fulfill the ancient promise: '...in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed' (**Genesis 12:3**). Nor will God's blessing be for her alone. It will be impartially given out to all nations." (P. 380)

Alexander translates / comments on **verse 23**: "*In that day there shall be a highway from Egypt to Assyria, and Assyria shall come into Egypt and Egypt into Assyria, and Egypt (or the Egyptians) shall serve with Assyria...*

"No one, it is probable, has ever yet maintained that a road was literally opened up between Egypt and Assyria, or that Isaiah expected it. All classes of interpreters agree that the opening of the highway is a figure for easy, free, and intimate communication. This unanimous admission of a metaphor in this place not only shows that the same mode of interpretation is admissible in the other parts of the same prophecy, but makes it highly probable that what is said of altars and sacrifices is to be likewise understood." (P. 362)

We disagree. A road or highway or trade route has existed between Egypt and Assyria throughout the ages. And the prediction can be understood as meant literally, not only as a figure for easy communication.

"Via Maris is the modern name for an ancient trade route, dating from the early Bronze Age, linking Egypt with the northern empires of Syria, Anatolia and

(continued...)

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<sup>105</sup>(...continued)

Mesopotamia--modern day Iran, Iraq, Israel, Turkey and Syria. In Latin, Via Maris means "way of the sea." It is a historic road that runs along the Israeli Mediterranean coast. It was the most important route from Egypt to Syria (the Fertile Crescent) which followed the coastal plain before crossing over into the plain of Jezreel and the Jordan valley.

"The name 'Via Maris' is not ancient, and academic researchers prefer other names, for instance 'International Trunk Road.' Together with the King's Highway, the Via Maris was one of the major trade routes connecting Egypt and the Levant with Anatolia and Mesopotamia. The Via Maris was crossed by other trading routes, so that one could travel from Africa to Europe or from Asia to Africa." (Wikipedia, 9/8/2016)

To hold that Isaiah could not have envisioned the opening up of that ancient highway / trade route, enabling free passage from Egypt to Assyria, and that Isaiah's words must be understood figuratively, as only a metaphor, not literally, is, we think, incorrect.

Alexander adds that 'Some understand it as relating only to commercial intercourse; others confine it to religious union. But the same thing is true here and in **verse 18**, that while the language itself denotes intimate connection and free intercourse in general, the context renders the idea of spiritual union prominent." (P. 362) We agree.

Gray comments on **verse 23** that "There will be easy communication by means of a highway...which Assyrians and Egyptians will use equally for friendly passage to one another's country." (P. 341)

Motyer entitles **verse 23** "Harmony in worship."

He comments that "The true bearing of the oracles which have focused on Egypt is that Egypt is a 'case in point' of the Lord's purpose to unite the whole world in His worship. True religion heals wounds between people...This is the third stage in the spreading kingdom of peace: first a few cities (**verse 18**), then a whole country (**verse 19**), now the whole world [no--Egypt, Assyria and Israel]. The emphasis rests on the oneness people feel with each other and the free expression they give to it." (P. 169)

But Motyer is reading "the whole world" into the text, which certainly does not make such a statement.

Kaiser entitles **verse 23** "The highway from Egypt to Syria." We wonder if this is a mistake, and that Kaiser meant "The highway from Egypt to Assyria."

He comments that "The theologian who speaks here has developed the ideas of the immediately preceding verse and has also included the Seleucid kingdom, which He here names Assyria, in the hope of salvation." (P. 109) Now we understand Kaiser's

(continued...)



וּבַאֲשׁוּר בְּמִצְרַיִם וּבְמִצְרַיִם בְּאֲשׁוּר

וְעָבְדוּ מִצְרַיִם אֶת־אֲשׁוּר:

On that day there will be a highway<sup>106</sup> from Egypt to Assyria,<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>105</sup>(...continued)

title. Holding as he does, that these verses are from very late post-exilic times, when Assyria was no more—it is not in fact Assyria that is meant, but rather the kingdom of the Macedonian Seleucids, who reigned in the general area formerly held by the Assyrians. See our end-note 9 for a **Wikipedia** article on the Seleucid Empire.

Again we remark that Kaiser is from Germany, which has a traditional biblical interpretation of breaking up biblical documents into fragments, and dating those fragments in later times—which Alexander depicts in his massive commentary. But while Kaiser seems so confident in his dating of these texts, there is little if any agreement among those earlier German scholars as to those dates. We think such a procedure is an exercise in futility, but still respect many of the observations on the text which Kaiser (and those earlier commentators) make(s).

<sup>106</sup>Slotki comments on the word “highway” that it will be “through the Land of Israel, connecting Assyria in the north with Egypt in the south. There will be unrestricted intercourse between the three nations, evidencing a state of peace.” (P. 92)

Pauli’s translation of the Aramaic Targum has the last two lines of **verse 23** as: “and the Assyrians shall fight against the Egyptians, and the Egyptians against the Assyrians, and the Egyptians shall serve the Assyrians”—anything but a state of peace!

Oswalt comments that “A *highway* is a favorite metaphor in this book for the removal of alienation and separation (**11:16** [a highway from Assyria for Israel’s remnant]; **33:8** [depicting a time of destruction, when highways lie wasted]; **35:8** [prediction of a highway called ‘the way of holiness’]; **40:3** [a voice commands, ‘in the wilderness, make straight a highway for our God’]; **49:11** [in the coming time of salvation, all of YHWH’s highways will be raised up]; **62:10** [the command is given to build a highway for the people of YHWH])...

“In rough and hilly Israel, the force of such a figure is obvious. God’s longing is for swift and open communication between Himself and all peoples, but also among all peoples. His promise is that it will be so one day. In this respect Assyria and Egypt stand for all the warring nations of the earth.” (Pp. 380-81)

(continued...)

and Assyria will come into Egypt, and Egypt into Assyria;  
and Egyptians will serve Assyria.<sup>108, 10</sup>

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<sup>106</sup>(...continued)

Perhaps...but the text does not say this. Rather, it is very specific in its naming three nations—not all the nations of the earth.

<sup>107</sup>Gray comments on Assyria, that “If the verses were written before the last decade of the 7<sup>th</sup> century [700 to 601 B.C.E.], this refers to the Assyrian Empire; if later, to one of the Empires which succeeded to the command of the Euphrates valley—the Persian or the Seleucid.” (P. 341) See our end-note 10 for a **Wikipedia** article on the Assyrian Empire.

<sup>108</sup>Slotki’s translation of the Hebrew phrase **וְעָבְדוּ מִצְרַיִם אֶת־אֲשׁוּר** is “and the Egyptians shall worship with the Assyrians.” He comments that this means both the Egyptians and the Assyrians will worship “the true God.” Then he adds that “The Hebrew could be translated, ‘the Egyptians shall serve Assyria.’ It was so understood by the [Aramaic] Targum and other ancient Versions and [was] adopted by Ibn Ezra; but Kimchi [also known as RaDaK, ‘Rabbi David Kimchi’] construes as does **American-Jewish Translation of the Scriptures** and it is supported by the next verse where the three peoples are described as equals.” (Pp. 92-93)

Alexander comments that “Some understand the clause to mean that the Egyptians should serve with the Assyrians in the same army, under the same leader, that is, Alexander the great or his successors. But **עָבַד** is nowhere absolutely used, if at all, in this modern military sense, which is moreover wholly inadmissible in **verse 21**.” (P. 363)

Gray states that “The service in which Egypt and Assyria are to cooperate is (ritual) service to Yahweh; compare, of Egypt, **verse 21**.” (P. 341)

Watts points out the difficulty involved in translation: **עָבַד** in **verse 21** had a cultic meaning ‘to serve,’ ‘worship.’ [**Rahlf**s] translates [by] δουλεύουσιν οἱ Αἰγύπτιοι τοῖς Ἀσσυρίοις, “The Egyptians will serve the / with the Assyrians,” which is again ambiguous, and may be taken in both senses. **NETS** translates by “and the Egyptians will be subject to the Assyrians.” The verb δουλεύω often means “be a slave to, serving other humans,” but it is also used of “being a slave to, serving God.” Here, it probably means that the Egyptians will be enslaved to the Assyrians.

Kaiser notes that while the Hebrew text predicts united worship of YHWH by both Egypt and Assyria, **Rahlf**s, the Aramaic Targum, and the Latin Vulgate “see this passage as a prophecy of a war between the two nations, which ends with a victory of the Assyrians over the Egyptians.” (P. 105)

(continued...)

<sup>108</sup>(...continued)

But neither the Greek translation nor the Latin Vulgate mention war between Assyria and Egypt—only the Aramaic Targum:

#### Rahlfs,

τῇ ἡμέρᾳ ἐκείνῃ ἔσται ὁδὸς Αἰγύπτου πρὸς Ἀσσυρίους καὶ εἰσελεύσονται Ἀσσύριοι εἰς Αἴγυπτον καὶ Αἰγύπτιοι πορεύσονται πρὸς Ἀσσυρίους καὶ δουλεύσουσιν οἱ Αἰγύπτιοι τοῖς Ἀσσυρίοις, “On that day, there will be a road of / from Egypt to Assyrians, and Assyrians will enter into Egypt, and Egyptians will go to Assyrians, and the Egyptians will serve the Assyrians.”

#### Latin Vulgate,

in die illa erit via de Aegypto in Assyrios et intrabit Assyrius Aegyptum et Aegyptius in Assyrios et servient Aegyptii Assur, “In that day there shall be a way from Egypt to the Assyrians, and the Assyrian shall enter into Egypt, and the Egyptian to the Assyrians, and the Egyptians shall serve the Assyria.”

#### Aramaic Targum (Pauli),

And at that time there shall be a highway from Egypt to Assyria; and the Assyrians shall fight against the Egyptians, and the Egyptians against the Assyrians, and the Egyptians shall serve the Assyrians.

<sup>109</sup>Oswalt comments on **verses 24-25** that “Israel, Egypt, and Assyria are placed on a par [a level of equality]. Among them Israel will exist for blessing, but all of them are at one before God [but the statement is ambiguous, and may mean that all three nations will be a blessing]...”

“In a remarkable statement Isaiah applies terms previously restricted to Israel to both Egypt and Assyria. He calls Egypt *My people* (compare **Isaiah 10:24** [YHWH’s people who live in Zion]; **43:6** [the scattered Israelites], **7** [everyone called by YHWH’s name]; **Hosea 2:1**<sup>Heb</sup> / **1:10**<sup>Eng</sup> [they will be called ‘children of the living God’]; **2:25**<sup>Heb</sup> / **23**<sup>Eng</sup> [those who have been called no people, will be called ‘My people’]; **Jeremiah 11:4** [the Israelites, delivered from Egypt, are to be called ‘My people’]) and Assyria *the work of My hand* (compare **Isaiah 60:21** [in the good times coming, Israel will be called the work of My hands]; **64:8** [a confession: ‘we are the work of Your hand’]; **Psalms 119:73** [a confessions: ‘Your hands have made me’]; **138:8** [a prayer, ‘Do not forsake the work of Your hands’])...”

“It is true that the favorite term My inheritance is reserved for Israel (compare **Deuteronomy 32:9** [how does Oswalt know that this was a ‘favorite’ term?]), but claims

(continued...)

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<sup>109</sup>(...continued)

that this term gives a slightly special standing to Israel lack evidence. The point being made is that if Israel turns to the nations in trust she will be prostituting her ministry to them [nothing like this is said in the text; this is Oswalt's theological mantra]. Instead, she is to be the vehicle whereby those very nations can turn to her God and become partners with her in service to Him and enjoying His blessings [again, nothing is said in the text about Israel's being the vehicle whereby those nations can turn to her God]." (P. 381)

Motyer entitles **verses 24-25** "Co-equality with the Lord."

He comments that "The final 'in that day' section is the capstone. The fellowship they feel (**verse 23**) is objectively ratified as the Lord says *Egypt My people, Assyria My handiwork* and *Israel My inheritance*...In Egypt the word once was 'Let My people go' (**Exodus 5:1**), but now *Egypt* is *My people*. Nothing could more wonderfully signalize what God has wrought." (P. 170)

Kaiser entitles **verses 24-25** "The blessed community of nations."

He comments that "In these verses the hope contained in the faith of the **Old Testament** reaches a height and range which puts it on the level of **Isaiah 2:2-4** and **Zephaniah 2:11; 3:9b, 10**; compare also **Isaiah 45:20ff**. There is no longer a narrowly exclusive hope of salvation which can conceive of the freedom and salvation of Israel only when other nations are enslaved and put to shame.

"The ancient enmity between the people of God who were once called out of Egypt and the nations and powers along the Nile and in the region of northern Syria and Mesopotamia comes to an end when they turn to Yahweh. Their former enmity now becomes a unity in which the people blessed by Yahweh become at the same time a blessing for the nations...Thus God's blessing no longer applies solely to Israel; the nations are also blessed." (Pp. 110-11)

Slotki comments on **verse 24** that "The triple alliance will be a blessing to the world." (P. 93) This is different from Oswalt's view that Israel is to be the blessing, as if Egypt and Assyria are not.

Alexander translates **verse 24**: "*In that day shall Israel be a third with respect to Egypt and Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth.*"

He comments that "The meaning obviously is that Israel should be one of three, or a party to a triple union...The word [שְׁלִישִׁיָּהוּ]...means a third part, or one equal part out of three. The idea meant to be conveyed, however, is not, as Cocceius supposes, merely that of equality in magnitude or power, but also that of intimate conjunction, as in the preceding verse." (P. 363)

(continued...)

בְּרִכָּה בְּקֶרֶב הָאָרֶץ:

In that day, Israel will be a third one<sup>110</sup> to Egypt and to Assyria—<sup>111</sup>  
a blessing in the earth's midst,

19:25<sup>112</sup> אֲשֶׁר בְּרַכּוּ יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת לְאֹמֶר

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<sup>109</sup>(...continued)

Watts comments on **verse 24** that “This verse is the climax of the scene. Israel stands with Egypt and Assyria as a means of blessing in the midst of the earth... *Blessing in the land* is a reminder of **Genesis 12:3**...Worship of Yahweh by Assyria and Egypt implies that they ‘bless themselves’ by the God of Abraham.” (P. 260)

We say, Perhaps...but the text may just as well mean that they become a blessing to others.

<sup>110</sup>Slotki's translation has “the third,” although there is no definite article in the Hebrew. Slotki states that this means Israel will be “Partner in this league of nations.” (P. 93)

But there is no such phrase as “league of nations” in the text, which reminds us of the “League of Nations” (1920-46) that preceded the “United Nations” (1945-present) in modern history. Does Isaiah's prophetic message include the prediction of an early “league of nations”?

<sup>111</sup>Where our Hebrew text has לְמִצְרַיִם וְלְאַשּׁוּר, “to Egypt and to Assyria,” **Rahfs** has the reverse order, ἐν τοῖς Ἀσσυρίοις καὶ ἐν τοῖς Αἰγυπτίοις, ‘with / among the Assyrians and with / among the Egyptians.’

<sup>112</sup>Alexander translates / comments on **verse 25**: “Which Jehovah of hosts has blessed (or with which Jehovah of hosts has blessed it) saying, Blessed be My people Egypt, and the work of My hands Assyria, and My heritage (or peculiar people) Israel. The perfect union of the three great powers in the service of God and the enjoyment of His favor is now expressed by a solemn benediction on the three, in which language commonly applied to Israel exclusively is extended to Egypt and Assyria...”

“Some writers understand the last clause as still making a distinction in favor of Israel, as if he had said, Egypt is indeed My people and Assyria My handiwork, but Israel after all and alone is My inheritance...Where his very object seems to be to represent the three united powers as absolutely one in privilege, it cannot be supposed that he would wind up by saying that they are not absolutely equal after all...”

“The correct view of the verse seems to be this: In order to express once more

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<sup>112</sup>(...continued)

and in the most emphatic manner the admission of Egypt and Assyria to the privileges of the chosen people, he selects three titles commonly bestowed upon the latter exclusively, to wit, God's people, the work of His hands, and His inheritance, and these three he distributes to the three united powers without discrimination or invidious [unfairly discriminating] distinction...

"As to the application of the prophecy, there are three distinct opinions...

1. ...the prophet here anticipates a state of peace and international communion between Egypt, Israel, and Assyria in his own times, which may or may not have been actually realized. [We say, no, it was not realized in Isaiah's own times, nor at any later time to our knowledge]...
2. Another is that he predicts what actually did take place under the reign of Alexander [the Great] and the two great powers that succeeded him, that is the Graeco-Syrian and Egyptian monarchies, by which the true religion was protected and diffused, and the way prepared for the preaching of the gospel. [We say, no, what this passage predicts did not happen under Alexander the Great nor under the Seleucids or the Ptolemies]...
3. A third is that Egypt and Assyria are here named as the two great heathen powers known to the Jews, whose country lay between them, and was often the scene, if not the subject, of their conquests, so that for ages they were commonly in league with the one against the other. To describe these two great belligerent powers as at peace with Israel and one another, was not only to foretell a most surprising resolution in the state of the world, but to intimate at least a future change in the relation of the Jews and Gentiles. When he goes still further and describes these representatives of heathenism as received into the covenant, and sharing with the church of God its most distinctive titles, we have one of the clearest and most striking predictions of the calling of the Gentiles that the word of God contains. [We say, no—the text is about three nations being united in the worship of YHWH, not the whole world of nations]...

"When Egypt, Assyria, and Israel are thus united, it will be because God has already blessed them, saying, etc...How far the early Jews were below the genuine spirit of the prophecies, may be gathered from the fact that both [Rahfs] and [the Aramaic] Targum make this a promise to Israel exclusively, Assyria and Egypt being mentioned merely as the places where they had experienced affliction." (Pp. 363-65)

**Rahfs:** ἦν εὐλόγησεν κύριος σαβαωθ λέγων εὐλογημένος ὁ λαός μου ὁ ἐν Αἰγύπτῳ καὶ ὁ ἐν Ἀσσυρίοις καὶ ἡ κληρονομία μου Ἰσραηλ, "which [the earth] Lord Sabaoth blessed, saying, Having been blessed (is) the people of Mine, the one in Egypt and the one in / among Assyrians, and the inheritance of Mine, Israel."

(continued...)

בְּרוּךְ עַמִּי מִצְרַיִם

וּמֵעַשָׂה יְדֵי אֲשׁוּר

וּנְחֻלַּתִּי יִשְׂרָאֵל:

which YHWH of Armies blessed him / it,<sup>113</sup> saying

Blessed (is) My people Egypt,<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>112</sup>(...continued)

**Pauli's Aramaic Translation of the Targum of Isaiah:** "Whom the Lord of hosts hath blessed, saying, Blessed be my people whom I have brought out of Egypt; and

because they sinned before me, I carried them captive into Assyria; but when they repent, they are called my people, and Israel mine inheritance." (On the Internet, 9/8/2016)

<sup>113</sup>Slotki holds that this phrase, אֲשֶׁר בֵּרַכְוּ יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת, literally "which He blessed him, YHWH of Armies," means "YHWH blessed Israel." (P. 93) Translations of the phrase vary:

**King James**, "Whom the LORD of hosts shall bless";

**Tanakh**, "for the LORD of Hosts will bless them";

**New Revised Standard**, "whom the LORD of hosts has blessed";

**New International**, "The LORD Almighty will bless them";

**New Jerusalem**, "and Yahweh Sabaoth will bless them";

**Rahfs**, ἦν εὐλόγησεν κύριος σαβαωθ, "which [referring to the earth] Lord Sabaoth blessed..."

Notice that the following lines depict YHWH blessing all three nations.

<sup>114</sup>In **Exodus 3:7** and numerous times elsewhere, Israel is called by YHWH עַמִּי, "My people." Here, that same phrase is applied to Egypt.

**Rahfs** translates by ὁ λαός μου ὁ ἐν Αἰγύπτῳ, the people of Mine, the one in Egypt," which as Watts notes, "loses the force of the concluding statement." (P. 257)

The Greek translation of the entire verse is: ἦν εὐλόγησεν κύριος σαβαωθ λέγων εὐλογημένος ὁ λαός μου ὁ ἐν Αἰγύπτῳ καὶ ὁ ἐν Ἀσσυρίοις καὶ ἡ κληρονομία μου Ἰσραηλ, "which (feminine singular, referring to the preceding feminine singular noun, γῆ, 'earth / land') Lord Sabaoth blessed saying, Having been blessed (is) the people of Mine, the one in Egypt and the one among Assyrians and the inheritance of Mine, Israel."

(continued...)

and product of My hands, Assyria,  
and My inheritance, Israel!<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>114</sup>(...continued)

As translated by the Greek, the verse can be understood to mean the Lord's inheritance, Israel, has been blessed by the Lord, whether they are in Egypt or in Assyria. However it is understood, it certainly muddles the clear affirmation of YHWH's blessing on Egypt, Assyria, and Israel.

<sup>115</sup>Slotki comments that in the language "*My people...work of My hands...Mine inheritance*" the "titles assigned to them are in ascending order of Divine affection." (P. 93)

We do not see any "order of Divine affection" being expressed; rather, all of the expressions are indicative of intimate, personal relationship with YHWH.

Gray states the "*the work of My hands*, the [phrase] used of Assyria was in itself of the widest importance once the belief in Yahweh as Creator had developed." (P. 341). The phrase is used of Israel in **Isaiah 60:21** and **64:7<sup>Heb</sup> / 8<sup>Eng</sup>**.

But of course, belief in YHWH as the universal Creator of all peoples and nations means all peoples and nations are "the work of YHWH's hands," a most important faith to ascribe to!

Watts states: "This is one of the most universal statements of Yahweh's intentions to be found in [the **Bible**]," and he asks, "Can one imagine? Modern Egypt, Israel, and Syria-Iraq becoming a triad of blessing and peace today? Open borders, flowing commerce, mutual worship?" (P. 262)

How do you evaluate this prophetic prediction of the blessing of Egypt by YHWH, and the coming together of Egypt, Assyria, and Israel in the worship of YHWH? We say, it is a depiction of the Divine desire for a worship that goes far beyond the borders of "the Holy Land." YHWH wants to make Himself known to Egypt and to Assyria, just as He has made Himself known to Israel. He wants His worship to spread into those "foreign" countries, so that He can bless them as they come to know and love Him.

There is nothing here about building a wall of exclusion around YHWH's people, and forbidding foreigners from entering unless they become proselytes. As depicted in **chapter 18**, YHWH is calling to the most distant of nations, the unknown, unnamed people of Central Africa, wanting to accept their worship of Him. Now, in **chapter 19**, the two greatest, most powerful enemy nations of Israel are depicted as being blessed by YHWH, and entering into His worship, becoming, side by side with Israel, a blessing in the earth.

What do you think? Do you think there can be a genuine religion that is less than an outreaching, missionary religion, anxious to share the good news of God with

(continued...)



## 1. **Instruction of Amenemope Compared to the Book of Proverbs**

“Instruction of Amenemope (also called Instructions of Amenemopet, Wisdom of Amenemopet) is a literary work composed in Ancient Egypt, most likely during the Ramesside Period (about 1300–1075 B.C.E. [centuries before the time of Isaiah]); it contains thirty chapters of advice for successful living, ostensibly written by the scribe Amenemope son of Kanakht as a legacy for his son. A characteristic product of the New Kingdom “Age of Personal Piety,” the work reflects on the inner qualities, attitudes, and behaviors required for a happy life in the face of increasingly difficult social and economic circumstances. It is widely regarded as one of the masterpieces of ancient near-eastern wisdom literature and has been of particular interest to modern scholars because of its relationship to the biblical **Book of Proverbs**...

“The author takes for granted the principles of Natural law and concentrates on the deeper matters of conscience. He counsels that the weaker classes of society are defended, respect is shown to the elderly, widows and the poor, whilst condemning any abuse of power or authority. The author draws an emphatic contrast between two types of men: the "silent man", who goes about his business without drawing attention to himself or demanding his rights, and the "heated man", who makes a nuisance of himself to everyone and is constantly picking fights with others over matters of no real importance. Contrary to worldly expectation, the author assures his reader that the former will ultimately receive the Divine blessing, while the latter will inevitably go to destruction. Amenemope counsels modesty, self-control, generosity, and scrupulous honesty, while discouraging pride, impetuosity, self-advancement, fraud, and perjury—not only out of respect for Maat, the cosmic principle of right order, but also because ‘attempts to gain advantage to the detriment of others incur condemnation, confuse the plans of God, and lead inexorably to disgrace and punishment.’” (**Wikipedia**, 9/11/2016)

A number of passages in the Instruction of Amenemope have been compared with the **Book of Proverbs**, including:

**Proverbs 22:17-18:** “Incline thine ear, and hear the words of the wise, And apply thine heart to my doctrine; For it is pleasant if thou keep them in thy belly, that they may be established together upon thy lips.”

**Amenemope, ch. 1:** "Give thine ear, and hear what I say, And apply thine heart to apprehend; It is good for thee to place them in thine heart, let them rest in the casket of thy belly; That they may act as a peg upon thy tongue"

**Proverbs 22:22:** "Rob not the poor, for he is poor, neither oppress (or crush) the lowly in the gate."

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<sup>115</sup>(...continued)  
others?

**Amenemope, ch. 2:** "Beware of robbing the poor, and oppressing the afflicted."

**Proverbs 22:24-5:** "Do not befriend the man of anger, Nor go with a wrathful man, Lest thou learn his ways and take a snare for thy soul."

**Amenemope, ch. 10:** "Associate not with a passionate man, Nor approach him for conversation; Leap not to cleave to such an one; That terror carry thee not away."

**Proverbs 22:29:** "[If] you see a man quick in his work, before kings will he stand, before cravens, he will not stand."

**Amenemope, ch. 30:** "A scribe who is skillful in his business findeth [is found?] worthy to be a courtier."

**Proverbs 23:1:** "When thou sittest to eat with a ruler, Consider diligently what is before thee; And put a knife to thy throat, If thou be a man given to appetite. Be not desirous of his dainties, for they are breads of falsehood."

**Amenemope, ch. 23:** "Eat not bread in the presence of a ruler, And lunge not forward(?) with thy mouth before a governor(?). When thou art replenished with that to which thou hast no right, It is only a delight to thy spittle. Look upon the dish that is before thee, And let that (alone) supply thy need."

**Proverbs 23:4-5:** "Toil not to become rich, And cease from dishonest gain; For wealth maketh to itself wings, Like an eagle that flieth heavenwards."

**Amenemope, ch. 7:** "Toil not after riches; If stolen goods are brought to thee, they remain not over night with thee. They have made themselves wings like geese. And have flown into the heavens."

**Proverbs 14:7:** "Speak not in the hearing of a fool, for he will despise the wisdom of thy words."

**Amenemope, ch. 21:** "Empty not thine inmost soul to everyone, nor spoil (thereby) thine influence"

**Proverbs 23:10:** "Remove not the widows landmark; And enter not into the field of the fatherless."

**Amenemope, ch. 6:** "Remove not the landmark from the bounds of the field...and violate not the widows boundary."

**Proverbs 23:12):** "Apply thine heart unto instruction and thine ears to the words of knowledge."

**Amenemope, ch. 1:** "Give thine ears, hear the words that are said, give thine heart to interpret them." (**Wikipedia**, 9/11/2016)

2. **Wikipedia Article on Tanis (Zoan)**

“Tanis was a city in ancient Egypt [located in the northeastern Delta to the north of Avaris] and served as a parallel religious center to Thebes in the Third Intermediate Period. No archaeological evidence from it pre-dates the reign of Psusennes I (1039-991 B.C.E., 21st Dynasty), but many scholars think it originated in the late New Kingdom [the ‘New Kingdom’ is dated between the 16<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries B.C.E.]. Tanis's creation was most likely due to the silting up of the Nile branch that ran by Pi-Ramesses, which forced people to seek another area with access to water. Later on, Tanis would become known as Thebes of Lower Egypt.

“The kings at Tanis saw themselves as the legitimate successors on the throne of Upper and Lower Egypt. They used traditional titles and displayed their royalty in building work, although that was insignificant when compared to activity at the height of the New Kingdom.

“Tanis was founded in the late Twentieth Dynasty [about 1187 to 1064 B.C.E.], and became the northern capital of Egypt during the following Twenty-first Dynasty [about 1063 to 943 B.C.E.]. It was the home city of Smendes, founder of the 21st dynasty. During the Twenty-second Dynasty [about 943 to 720 B.C.E.] Tanis remained as Egypt's political capital (though there were sometimes rival dynasties located elsewhere in Upper Egypt). It was an important commercial and strategic city until it was threatened with inundation by Lake Manzala in the 6th century C.E., when it was finally abandoned. The refugees founded the nearby city of Tennis.

“The Hebrew story of Moses’ being found in the marshes of the Nile River as told in **Exodus 2:3-5** is commonly located at Tanis...However...no supporting archaeological evidence has been unearthed [would anyone have thought there would be archaeological evidence of such an event?]. The demise of the city may well have been caused by the relocation of Nile tributaries.

“Tanis was the site of numerous archaeological digs beginning in the 19th century, involving Flinders Petrie and Auguste Mariette.

“In 1866, Karl Richard Lepsius discovered at Tanis the Decree of Canopus--an inscription closely related to the Rosetta Stone, which was likewise written in Egyptian (hieroglyphic and demotic) and Greek. This discovery contributed significantly to the decipherment of hieroglyphics.

“There are ruins of a number of temples, including the chief temple dedicated to Amun, and a very important royal necropolis [city of the dead] of the Third Intermediate Period [about 1070 to 712 B.C.E.] (which contains the only known intact royal Pharaonic burials--the tomb of Tutankhamun having been entered in antiquity). Many of the stones used to build the various temples at Tanis came from the old Ramesside town of Qantir (ancient Pi-Ramesses / Per-Ramesses), which caused many former generations of Egyptologists to believe that Tanis was, in fact, Per-Ramesses. However, the burials of three Dynasty 21 and Dynasty 22 pharaohs--Psusennes I, Amenemope and Shoshenq II-- survived the depredations of tomb robbers throughout antiquity. They were discovered intact in 1939 and 1940 by Pierre Montet and proved to contain a large catalogue of gold, jewelry, lapis lazuli and other precious stones including the funerary masks of these kings.” (2/14/2016)

3.

### **The Ancient Egyptian City of Noph / Memphis**

“Memphis, city and capital of ancient Egypt and an important centre during much of Egyptian history. Memphis is located south of the Nile River delta, on the west bank of the river, and about 15 miles south of modern Cairo. Closely associated with the ancient city’s site are the cemeteries, or necropolises, of Memphis, where the famous pyramids of Egypt are located. The Memphis archaeological zone was designated a UNESCO World Heritage site in 1979.

“According to a commonly accepted tradition, Memphis was founded about 2925 B.C.E. by Menes, who supposedly united the two prehistoric kingdoms of Upper and Lower Egypt. The original name of the city was the White Walls, and the term may have referred originally to the king’s palace, which would have been built of white-washed brick. The modern name of Memphis is a Greek version of the Egyptian Men-nefer, the name of the nearby pyramid of the 6th-dynasty about 2325-about 2150 B.C.E.) king Pepi I. Another geographic term for Memphis, Hut-ka-Ptah (‘mansion of the ka of Ptah’), rendered Aigyptos in Greek, was later applied to the country as a whole.

“Ptah, the local God of Memphis, was a patron of craftsmen and artisans and, in some contexts, a Creator God as well. The great temple of Ptah was one of the city’s most prominent structures. According to an Egyptian document known as the “Memphite Theology,” Ptah created humans through the power of his heart and speech; the concept, having been shaped in the heart of the Creator, was brought into existence through the Divine utterance itself.

“The prominence of Memphis during the earliest periods is indicated by the extensive cemeteries of the Early Dynastic period (about 2925-about 2575 B.C.E.) and Old Kingdom (about 2575-about 2130 B.C.E.) that cluster along the desert bluffs to the west.

“Memphis reached preeminence by the 3rd dynasty. The 3<sup>rd</sup>-century B.C.E. historian Manetho calls the 3rd and 4th dynasties (about 2650- about 2465 B.C.E.) Memphite, and the huge royal pyramid tombs of this period, in the necropolises of Memphis, confirm this. Djoser, the second king of the 3rd dynasty, was the builder of

the Step Pyramid of Saqqārah, the earliest royal foundation at Memphis and the first important stone building in Egypt.

“The first king of the 4th dynasty, Snefru, built two pyramid tombs at Dahshur. The three great pyramids of Giza belong to Khufu, Khafre, and Menkaure, later 4th-dynasty monarchs. The Great Sphinx at Giza dates from the time of Khafre. The last known king of this dynasty, Shepseskaf, built his tomb at South Saqqarah. It was not a pyramid but a distinctive oblong structure with sloping sides.

“Memphite influence continued during the Middle Kingdom (1938-about 1630 B.C.E.), when Egypt was once more reunited, with the official residence of the 12th dynasty (1938–about 1756 B.C.E.) at nearby Itj-tawy (near modern Al-Lisht), near the entrance to Al-Fayyum.

“A period of political and social chaos followed the 13th dynasty. This Second Intermediate Period (about 1630–1540 B.C.E.) is characterized by the presence in Egypt of the Asian Hyksos peoples. According to the 1st-century-C.E. historian Josephus, the Hyksos king, whom he calls Salitis, made his capital at Memphis and from there ruled both Upper and Lower Egypt. Inscriptional and archaeological evidence, though it is scanty, tends to confirm the assumption that the Hyksos controlled northern Egypt, but their capital is generally supposed to have been located at Avaris, near Tanis, in the Nile delta. Records left by Kamose, the 17th-dynasty (about 1630–1540 B.C.E.) king who initiated the reconquest of Egypt from the Hyksos, describe his holdings as extending from Elephantine to Hermopolis Magna but note that he “could not pass by (the invader) as far as Memphis.”

“With the final expulsion of the Hyksos and the restoration of a united kingdom under the 18th dynasty (about 1539-1292 B.C.E.), based at Thebes in Upper Egypt, Memphis entered a new period of prosperity. Some scholars claim that Memphis never lost its political preeminence and that during the New Kingdom (about 1539–1075 B.C.E.), as in earlier times, the city was the actual political capital of Egypt, with Thebes merely the religious center.”

Later, in the 8<sup>th</sup> century, the century in which Isaiah lived and proclaimed and wrote his messages, the Assyrians invaded Egypt. “Records left by the Assyrian king Esarhaddon (680–669 B.C.E.) refer to the siege and destruction of Memphis, the royal residence of one Tarku (Taharqa), king of Egypt, who became pharaoh in 690 B.C.E. After the death of Esarhaddon, Taharqa regained Memphis, but he was driven out of the city again by Ashurbanipal of Assyria, in 667/668 B.C.E.

The collapse of Assyria (612 B.C.E.) led to brief Egyptian independence under the 26th dynasty (664–525 B.C.E.), but it was not long before new invaders appeared. The Persian Cambyses II took Memphis by siege in 525 B.C.E. After years of Persian rule, Egypt was ready to welcome Alexander the Great in 332 B.C.E.. The conqueror used Memphis as his headquarters while making plans for his new city of Alexandria. After his death at Babylon, his body was brought to Egypt and was laid to rest temporarily in Memphis before being buried at Alexandria.” (**Encyclopedia Britannica**, on the Internet, 9/5/216)

#### 4. **The Ancient Egyptian City of Napata**

“Napata was founded by Thutmose III in the 15th century B.C.E. after his conquest of Nubia. The nearby Jebel Barkal was taken to mark the southern border of the New Kingdom.

“In 1075 B.C.E., the High Priest of Amun at Thebes, capital of Egypt, became powerful enough to limit the power of the pharaoh over Upper Egypt. This was the beginning of the Third Intermediate Period (1075–664 B.C.E.). The fragmentation of power in Egypt allowed the Nubians to regain autonomy. They founded a new kingdom, Kush, and centered it at Napata.

“In 750 B.C.E., Napata was a developed city, while Egypt was still suffering political instability. King Kashta ("the Cushite") profited from it, and attacked Upper Egypt. His policy was pursued by his successors Piye, and Shabaka (721–707 B.C.E.), who eventually brought the whole Nile Valley under Kushitic control in the second year of his reign. Shabaka also launched a monument-building policy in Egypt and Nubia. Overall, the Kushite kings ruled Upper Egypt for approximately one century and the whole Egypt for approximately 57 years, from 721 to 664 B.C.E. They constitute the Twenty-fifth Dynasty in Manetho's work, **Aegyptiaca**. The reunited Nile valley empire of the 25th dynasty was as large as it had been since the New Kingdom.

“The 25th dynasty ushered in a renaissance period for Ancient Egypt. Religion, the arts, and architecture were restored to their glorious Old, Middle, and New Kingdom forms. Pharaohs, such as Taharqa, built or restored temples and monuments throughout the Nile valley, including at Memphis, Karnak, Kawa, Jebel Barkal, etc. It was during the 25th dynasty that the Nile valley saw the first widespread construction of pyramids (many in modern Sudan) since the Middle Kingdom. However, Pharaoh Taharqa's reign and that of his successor, (his cousin) Tanutamun, was filled with constant conflict with the Assyrians. In 664 B.C.E. the Assyrians laid the final blow,

sacking Thebes and Memphis. The 25th dynasty ended with its rulers retreating to their spiritual homeland at Napata. It was there (at El-Kurru and Nuri) that all 25th dynasty pharaohs are buried under the first pyramids that the Nile valley had seen in centuries. The Napatan dynasty led to the Kingdom of Kush, which flourished in Napata and Meroe until at least the 2nd century C.E.

“Around 670 B.C.E., the Assyrian King Esarhaddon (681–669 B.C.E.) conquered Lower Egypt, but allowed local kingdoms in Lower Egypt to exist, in order to enlist them as his allies against the Kushite rulers of Upper Egypt, who had been accepted with reluctance.

“When King Assurbanipal succeeded Esarhaddon, the Kushite king Taharqa convinced some rulers of Lower Egypt to break with Assyrians. However, Assurbanipal overpowered the coalition and deported the Egyptian leaders to his capital, Niniveh. He appointed the Libyan chief Necho, ruler of Memphis and Sais. Necho I was the first king of the Saite Twenty-sixth Dynasty (664–525 B.C.E.) of Egypt. A new Kushite King Tantamani (664–653 B.C.E.) killed him the same year that Taharqa died, in 664 B.C.E. when Tantamani invaded Lower Egypt. However, Tantamani was unable to defeat the Assyrians who backed Necho’s son Psammetichus I. Tantamani eventually abandoned his attempt to conquer Lower Egypt and retreated to Napata. However, his authority over Upper Egypt was acknowledged until the 8th regnal year of his reign at Thebes (or 656 B.C.E.) when Psamtik I dispatched a naval fleet to Upper Egypt and succeeded in placing all of Egypt under his control.

“Napata remained the center of the Kingdom of Kush for another two generations, from the 650s to 590 B.C.E. Its economy was essentially based on gold, with 26th dynasty Egypt an important economic ally.

“Napatan architecture, paintings, writing script, and other artistic and cultural forms were in Kush style. Egyptian burial customs were practiced, including the resurrection of pyramid building. The Napatan dynasty and their successors built the first pyramids the Nile Valley had seen since the Middle Kingdom. Also, several Egyptian Gods were worshiped. The most important God was Amun, a Theban deity, His temple was the most important at Napata, located at the foot of Jebel Barkal.

“After the Persian conquest of Egypt, Napata lost its economic influence. The Napatan region itself was desiccating, leading to less cattle and agriculture. A Persian raid had seriously affected Napata in 591 B.C.E. Finally, Napata was losing its role of economic capital to Meroë. The Island of Meroë, the Peninsula formed by the Nile and the Atbara courses, was an area rich in iron, which was becoming an essential source of wealth. Meroe eventually became the capital of the kingdom of Kush, leading to the abandonment of Napata.

“In 23 B.C.E., the Roman prefect of Egypt invaded the kingdom after an initial attack by the queen of Meröe, razing Napata to the ground.” (9/20/2016)



5. **Quotations from Josephus Concerning Onias and Leontopolis**

**The Jewish War, I:33,**

“The high priest Onias made his escape to Ptolemy and, obtaining from him a site in the nome of Heliopolis, built a small town on the model of Jerusalem, and a temple resembling ours.”

**The Jewish War, VII:422-436,**

“Onias, son of Simon, and one of the chief priests at Jerusalem, fleeing from Antiochus, king of Syria, then at war with the Jews, came to Alexandria, and being graciously received by Ptolemy, owing to that monarch’s hatred of Antiochus, told him that he would make the Jewish nation his ally if he would accede to his proposal. The king having promised to do what was in his power, he asked permission to build a temple somewhere in Egypt and to worship God after the manner of his fathers; for, he added, the Jews would thus be still more embittered against Antiochus, who had sacked their temple at Jerusalem, and more amicably disposed towards himself, and many would flock to him for the sake of religious toleration.

“Induced by this statement, Ptolemy gave him a tract, a hundred and eighty furlongs [22.5 miles] distant from Memphis, in the so-called nome of Heliopolis. Here Onias erected a fortress and built his temple (which was not like that in Jerusalem, but resembled a tower) of huge stones and sixty cubits [90 feet] in altitude. The altar, however, he designed on the model of that in the home country, and adorned the building with similar offerings, the fashion of the lampstand excepted; for, instead of

making a stand, he had a lamp wrought of gold which shed a brilliant light and was suspended by a golden chain. The sacred precincts were wholly surrounded by a wall of baked brick, the doorways being of stone...

“The king, moreover, assigned him an extensive territory as a source of revenue, to yield both abundance for the priests and large provisions for the service of God. In all this, however, Onias was not actuated by honest motives; his aim was rather to rival the Jews at Jerusalem, against whom he harbored resentment for his exile, and he hoped by erecting this temple to attract the multitude away from them to it. There had, moreover, been an ancient prediction made some six hundred years before by one named Esaias [Greek pronunciation of Isaiah], who had foretold the erection of this temple in Egypt by a man of Jewish birth. Such then was the origin of this temple...

“The duration of the temple from its erection to its closure was three hundred and forty-three years.”

### **Antiquities of the Jews, XIII:62-71,**

“Now the son of the high priest Onias, who had the same name as his father, having fled to King Ptolemy surnamed Philometer, was living in Alexandria...and seeing that Judea was being ravaged by the Macedonians and their kings, and desiring to acquire for himself eternal fame and glory, he determined to send to King Ptolemy and Queen Cleopatra and request of them authority to build a temple in Egypt similar to that at Jerusalem, and to appoint Levites and priests of his own race. In this desire he was encouraged chiefly by the words of the prophet Isaiah, who had lived more than six hundred years before and had foretold that a temple to the Most High God was surely to be built in Egypt by a Jew. Being therefore, excited by these words, Onias wrote the following letter to Ptolemy and Cleopatra.

““Many and great are the services which I have rendered you in the course of the war, with the help of God, when I was in Coele-Syria and Phoenicia, and when I came with the Jews to Leontopolis in the nome of Heliopolis and to other places where our nation is settled; and I found that most of them have temples, contrary to what is proper, and that for this reason they are ill-disposed toward one another, as is also the case with the Egyptians because of the multitude of their temples and their varying opinions about the forms of worship...

“And I have found a most suitable place in the fortress called after Bubastis-of-the-Fields, which abounds in various kinds of trees and is full of sacred animals. Wherefore I beg you to permit me to cleanse this temple, which belongs to no one and is in ruins, and to build a temple to the Most High God in the likeness of that at Jerusalem and with the same dimensions, on behalf of you and your wife and children, in order that the Jewish inhabitants of Egypt may be able to come together there in mutual harmony and serve your interests. For this indeed is what the prophet Isaiah foretold, ‘There shall be an altar in Egypt to the Lord God,’ and many other things did he prophesy concerning this place.

“This, then, is what Onias wrote to King Ptolemy. And one may get a notion of

the king's piety and that of his sister and wife Cleopatra from the letter which they wrote in reply, for they placed the blame for the sin and transgression against the law on the head of Onias, writing the following reply.

“King Ptolemy and Queen Cleopatra, to Onias, greeting. We have read your petition asking that it be permitted you to cleanse the ruined temple in Leontopolis in the nome of Heliopolis, called Babastis-of-the-Fields. We wonder, therefore, whether it will be pleasing to God that a temple be built in a place so wild and full of sacred animals. But since you say that the prophet Isaiah foretold this long ago, we grant your request if this is to be in accordance with the law, so that we may not seem to have sinned against God in any way.’

“And so Onias took over the place and built a temple and an altar to God similar to that at Jerusalem, but smaller and poorer.”

## 6. **The Conversion of Egypt According to the Sibylline Oracles**

From **Book 5** of the **Sibylline Oracles, 484-510a-b**:

Isis, thrice-wretched Goddess, you will remain by the streams of the Nile alone, a speechless maenad [immortal female follower of Dionysus, the God of ritual ecstasy and madness, ‘raving one’] on the sands of the Acheron [a “river of woe” in hades]. No longer will memory of you remain throughout the whole earth.

And you, Serapis [a Graeco-Egyptian God, whose cult was introduced during the 3rd century B.C.E. on the orders of Ptolemy I of Egypt as a means to unify the Greeks and Egyptians in his realm. The God was depicted as Greek in appearance, but with Egyptian trappings, and combined iconography from a great many cults, signifying both abundance and resurrection], reposing on many unwrought stones, will lie, a very great casualty in thrice-wretched Egypt. But as many as brought the desire of Egypt to you will all bewail you bitterly, turning their attention to the imperishable God. Those who sang out your praises as a God will know that you are nothing.

Then a man clad in linen, one of the priests, will say, “Come, let us erect a sanctuary of

the true God. Come, let us change the terrible custom we have received from our ancestors on account of which they performed processions and rites to Gods of stone and earthenware, and were devoid of sense. Let us turn our souls, singing out the praises of the imperishable God Himself, the Begetter Who is eternal, the Ruler of all, the True One, the King, the Begetter Who nourishes souls, the great eternal God.”

Then there will be a great holy temple in Egypt, and a people fashioned by God will bring sacrifices to it. To them the imperishable God will grant to reside there. But when the Ethiopians leave the shameless tribes of the Triballi and are about to till the land of Egypt, they will launch on a course of wickedness, so that all the later things may come to pass, for they will destroy the great temple of the land of Egypt. God will rain on them a terrible wrath, down on earth, so as to destroy all the wicked and all the lawless.

There will no longer be any sparing in that land, because they did not guard what God entrusted to them. (Adapted from James H. Charlesworth, **The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha**, Volume I, pp. 404-05)

## 7. **Jewish Papyri and Temple at Elephantine Island on the Nile**

“The Elephantine Papyri consist of 175 documents from the Egyptian border fortresses of [the Nile River island of] Elephantine and Syene (Aswan), which yielded hundreds of papyri in hieratic, Demotic, Aramaic, Greek, Latin and Coptic, spanning a period of 2000 years. The documents include letters and legal contracts from family and other archives, and are thus an invaluable source of knowledge for scholars of varied disciplines such as epistolography, law, society, religion, language and onomastics. They are a collection of ancient Jewish manuscripts dating from the 5th century B.C.E. They come from a Jewish community at Elephantine, then called Yeb, the island in the Nile at the border of Nubia, which was probably founded as a military installation in about 650 B.C.E. during Manasseh's reign to assist Pharaoh Psammetichus I in his Nubian campaign. The dry soil of Upper Egypt preserved documents from the Egyptian border fortresses of Elephantine and Syene (Aswan). Hundreds of these Elephantine papyri, span a period of 1000 years. Legal documents and a cache of letters survived, turned up on the local 'gray market' of antiquities

starting in the late 19th century, and were scattered into several Western collections.

“Though some fragments on papyrus are much older, the largest number of papyri are written in Aramaic, the lingua franca of the Persian Empire, and document the Jewish community among soldiers stationed at Elephantine under Persian rule, 495–399 B.C.E. The Elephantine documents include letters and legal contracts from family and other archives: divorce documents, the manumission of slaves, and other business, and are a valuable source of knowledge about law, society, religion, language and onomastics, the sometimes surprisingly revealing study of names.

“The ‘Passover letter’ of 419 B.C.E. (discovered in 1907), which gives detailed instructions for properly keeping the passover is in the Egyptian Museum of Berlin. Further Elephantine papyri are at the Brooklyn Museum. The discovery of the Brooklyn papyri is a remarkable story itself. The documents were first acquired in 1893 by New York journalist Charles Edwin Wilbour. After lying in a warehouse for more than 50 years, the papyri were shipped to the Egyptian Department of the Brooklyn Museum. It was at this time that scholars finally realized that “Wilbour had acquired the first Elephantine papyri.”

“The Jews had their own temple to Yahweh, evincing polytheistic beliefs, which functioned alongside the temple of Khnum. Excavation work done in 1967 revealed the remains of the Jewish colony centered on a small temple.

“The ‘Petition to Bagoas’ (Sayce-Cowley collection) is a letter written in 407 B.C.E. to Bagoas, the Persian governor of Judea, appealing for assistance in rebuilding the Jewish temple in Elephantine, which had recently been badly damaged by an antisemitic rampage on the part of a segment of the Elephantine community. In the course of this appeal, the Jewish inhabitants of Elephantine speak of the antiquity of the damaged temple:

Now our forefathers built this temple in the fortress of Elephantine back in the days of the kingdom of Egypt, and when Cambyses came to Egypt he found it built. They (the Persians) knocked down all the temples of the Gods of Egypt, but no one did any damage to this temple.

The community also appealed for aid to Sanballat I, a Samaritan potentate, and his sons Delaiah and Shelemiah, as well as Johanan ben Eliashib. Both Sanballat and Johanan are mentioned in the Book of Nehemiah, 2:19, 12:23.

“There was a response of both governors (Bagoas and Delaiah) which gave the permission to rebuild the temple written in the form of a memorandum:

Memorandum of what Bagoas and Delaiah said to me, saying: Memorandum: You may say in Egypt ...to (re)build it on its site as it was formerly...

“By the middle of the 4th century B.C.E., the temple at Elephantine had ceased to function. There is evidence from excavations that the rebuilding and enlargement of the Khnum temple under Nectanebo II (360–343 B.C.E.) took the place of the former

temple of YHWH.

“In 2004, the Brooklyn Museum of Art created a display entitled "Jewish Life in Ancient Egypt: A Family Archive From the Nile Valley," which featured the interfaith couple of Ananiah, an official at the temple of Yahou (a.k.a. Yahweh), and his wife, Tamut, who was previously an Egyptian slave owned by a Jewish master, Meshullam.

“The papyri suggest that, "Even in exile and beyond, the veneration of a female deity endured." The texts were written by a group of Jews living at Elephantine near the Nubian border, whose religion has been described as "nearly identical to Iron Age II Judahite religion." The papyri describe the Jews as worshiping Anat-Yahu, Who is described as either the wife (or paredra, sacred consort) of Yahweh or as a hypostatized aspect of Yahweh.” (**Wikipedia**, 9/29/2016)

## 8. **Leontopolis / Tell el Yehudiyeh in Egypt**

“Leontopolis is the Greek name for the modern area of Tell el Yehudiye (Arabic: Mound of the Jews). It was an ancient city of Egypt in the 13th nome of Lower Egypt (the Heliopolite Nome), on the Pelusiac branch of the Nile. The site is known for its distinctive pottery known as Tell el-Yahudiyeh Ware.

“The site includes some massive rectangular earthwork enclosures of the late Middle Kingdom or Second Intermediate Period. They measure about 515m by 490m, and their purpose is probably defensive. These earthen walls were sloping and plastered on the outer face, and almost vertical on the inner face. Egyptian parallels for

such a structure are lacking. This enclosure is often interpreted as a fortification built by the Hyksos; it is generally known as the "Hyksos Camp." There are also cemeteries from the Middle Kingdom and later. A temple and palace of Ramesses II has also been excavated. Also, there was a palace of Ramesses III with some fine decorations.

“In the reign of Ptolemy VI Philometor (180–145 B.C.E.) a temple, modelled after that of Jerusalem, was founded by the exiled Jewish priest Onias IV. The Hebrew colony, which was attracted by the establishment of their national worship at Leontopolis, and which was increased by the refugees from the oppressions of the Seleucid kings in Palestine, flourished there for more than three centuries afterwards. After the outbreak of the Jewish War, the Leontopolite temple was closed in the first century C.E., amid the general backlash against Judaism.” (**Wikipedia**, 9/13/2016)

## 9. **The Seleucid Empire**

“Ancient Greek: Βασιλεία των Σελευκιδών, Kingdom of the Selucids, was a Hellenistic state ruled by the Seleucid dynasty, which existed from 312 B.C.E. to 63 B.C.E.; it was founded by Seleucus I Nicator following the division of the Macedonian empire vastly expanded by Alexander the Great. Seleucus received Babylonia and,

from there, expanded his dominions to include much of Alexander's near eastern territories. At the height of its power, it included central Anatolia, Persia, the Levant, Mesopotamia, and what is now Kuwait, Afghanistan, and parts of Pakistan and Turkmenistan.

“The Seleucid Empire was a major center of Hellenistic culture that maintained the preeminence of Greek customs where a Greek political elite dominated, mostly in the urban areas. The Greek population of the cities who formed the dominant elite were reinforced by immigration from Greece. Seleucid expansion into Anatolia and Greece was abruptly halted after decisive defeats at the hands of the Roman army. Their attempts to defeat their old enemy Ptolemaic Egypt [ruled by another of Alexander’s Generals] were frustrated by Roman demands. Having come into conflict with Chandragupta Maurya of the Maurya Empire, after several defeats, Seleucus entered into an agreement with Maurya where he ceded vast territory west of the Indus, including the Hindu Kush, modern day Afghanistan, and the Balochistan province of Pakistan and offered his daughter for marriage to the Emperor to formalize the alliance. Much of the eastern part of the empire was conquered by the Parthians under Mithridates I of Parthia in the mid-2nd century B.C.E., yet the Seleucid kings continued to rule a rump state from Syria until the invasion by Armenian king Tigranes the Great and their ultimate overthrow by the Roman general Pompey.

Alexander conquered the Persian Empire under its last Achaemenid dynast, Darius III, within a short time frame. He died young in 323 B.C.E., leaving an expansive empire of partly Hellenised culture without an adult heir. The empire was put under the authority of a regent in the person of Perdiccas, and the territories were divided between Alexander's generals, who thereby became satraps, at the Partition of Babylon, all in that same year.

“Alexander's generals (the Diadochi) jostled for supremacy over parts of his empire. Ptolemy, a former general and the satrap of Egypt, was the first to challenge the new system; this led to the demise of Perdiccas. Ptolemy's revolt led to a new subdivision of the empire with the Partition of Triparadisus in 320 B.C.E. Seleucus, who had been ‘Commander-in-Chief of the Companion cavalry’ and appointed first or court Chiliarch (which made him the senior officer in the Royal Army after the regent and commander-in-chief Perdiccas since 323 B.C.E., though he helped to assassinate him later) received Babylonia and, from that point, continued to expand his dominions ruthlessly. Seleucus established himself in Babylon in 312 B.C.E., the year used as the foundation date of the Seleucid Empire. He ruled not only Babylonia, but the entire enormous eastern part of Alexander's empire, as described by Appian:

Always lying in wait for the neighboring nations, strong in arms and persuasive in council, he [Seleucus] acquired Mesopotamia, Armenia, 'Seleucid' Cappadocia, Persis, Parthia, Bactria, Arabia, Tapouria, Sogdia, Arachosia, Hyrcania, and other adjacent peoples that had been subdued by Alexander, as far as the river Indus, so that the boundaries of his empire were the most extensive in Asia after that of Alexander. The whole region from Phrygia to the Indus was subject to Seleucus.



“Seleucus went as far as India, where, after two years of war, he reached an agreement with Chandragupta Maurya, in which he exchanged his eastern territories for a considerable force of 500 war elephants, which would play a decisive role at Ipsus (301 B.C.E.). Strabo, in his *Geographica*, wrote:

The Indians occupy [in part] some of the countries situated along the Indus, which formerly belonged to the Persians: Alexander deprived the Ariani of them, and established there settlements of his own. But Seleucus Nicator gave them to Sandrocottus (Chandragupta Maurya) in consequence of a marriage contract, and received in return five hundred elephants.

“Following his and Lysimachus' victory over Antigonus Monophthalmus at the decisive Battle of Ipsus in 301 B.C.E., Seleucus took control over eastern Anatolia and northern Syria.

“In the latter area, he founded a new capital at Antioch on the Orontes, a city he named after his father. An alternative capital was established at Seleucia on the Tigris, north of Babylon. Seleucus's empire reached its greatest extent following his defeat of his erstwhile ally, Lysimachus, at Corupedion in 281 B.C.E., after which Seleucus expanded his control to encompass western Anatolia. He hoped further to take control of Lysimachus's lands in Europe—primarily Thrace and even Macedonia itself, but was assassinated by Ptolemy Ceraunus on landing in Europe.

“His son and successor, Antiochus I Soter, was left with an enormous realm consisting of nearly all of the Asian portions of the Empire, but faced with Antigonus II Gonatas in Macedonia and Ptolemy II Philadelphus in Egypt, he proved unable to pick up where his father had left off in conquering the European portions of Alexander's empire.” (**Wikipedia**, 9/18/2016)

“Assyria, a major Mesopotamian East Semitic-speaking kingdom and empire of the ancient Near East, existed as an independent state from perhaps as early as the 25th century B.C.E., until its collapse between 612 B.C.E. and 599 B.C.E., spanning the mid to Early Bronze Age through to the late Iron Age.

“From the end of the seventh century B.C.E. to the mid-seventh century C.E., it survived as a geopolitical entity, for the most part ruled by foreign powers, although the Neo-Assyrian Empire and successor states arose at different times during the Parthian and early Sasanian Empires between the mid-second century B.C.E. and late third century C.E., a period which also saw Assyria become a major centre of Syriac Christianity and the birthplace of the Church of the East.

“Centered on the Tigris in Upper Mesopotamia (modern northern Iraq, northeastern Syria, southeastern Turkey and the northwestern fringes of Iran), the Assyrians came to rule powerful empires at several times. Making up a substantial part of the greater Mesopotamian "cradle of civilization," which included Sumer, the Akkadian Empire, and Babylonia, Assyria was at the height of technological, scientific and cultural achievements for its time. At its peak, the Assyrian empire stretched from Cyprus in the Mediterranean Sea to Iran, and from what is now Armenia and Azerbaijan in the Caucasus, to the Arabian Peninsula, Egypt and eastern Libya.

“Assyria is named after its original capital, the ancient city of Asshur, which dates to about 2600 B.C.E., originally one of a number of Akkadian city states in Mesopotamia. In the 25th and 24th centuries B.C.E., Assyrian kings were pastoral leaders. From the late 24th century BC, the Assyrians became subject to Sargon of Akkad, who united all the Akkadian- and Sumerian-speaking peoples of Mesopotamia under the Akkadian Empire, which lasted from about 2334 B.C.E. to 2154 B.C.E.

“After its fall, the greater remaining part of Assyria was a geopolitical region and province of other nations between the mid-2nd century B.C.E. and late 3rd century C.E., with a patchwork of small independent Assyrian kingdoms adjacent to it. The region of Assyria fell under the successive control of the Medes, the Achaemenid Empire, the Seleucid Empire, the Parthian Empire, the Roman Empire, and the Sasanian Empire. The Muslim conquest of Persia in the mid-seventh century finally dissolved it as a single entity, after which the remnants of the Assyrian people gradually became an ethnic, linguistic, cultural and religious minority in the Assyrian homeland, surviving there to this day as an indigenous people of the region.” (Wikipedia, 9/9/2016)