

Adam Clarke:

Introduction

Prophecy concerning Egypt, in which her lamentable condition under the Babylonians, Persians, etc., is forcibly pointed out, vv. 1-17. The true religion shall be propagated in Egypt; referring primarily to the great spread of Judaism in that country in the reign of the Ptolemies, and ultimately to its reception of the Gospel in the latter days, Isaiah 19:18-22. Profound peace between Egypt, Assyria, and Israel, and their blessed condition under the Gospel, Isaiah 19:23-25.

Not many years after the destruction of Sennacherib's army before Jerusalem, by which the Egyptians were freed from the yoke with which they were threatened by so powerful an enemy, who had carried on a successful war of three years' continuance against them; the affairs of Egypt were again thrown into confusion by intestine broils among themselves, which ended in a perfect anarchy, that lasted some few years. This was followed by an aristocracy, or rather tyranny, of twelve princes, who divided the country between them, and at last by the sole dominion of Psammitichus, which he held for fifty-four years. Not long after that followed the invasion and conquest of Egypt by Nebuchadnezzar, and then by the Persians under Cambyses, the son of Cyrus. The yoke of the Persians was so grievous, that the conquest of the Persians by Alexander may well be considered as a deliverance to Egypt; especially as he and his successors greatly favored the people and improved the country. To all these events the prophet seems to have had a view in this chapter; and in particular, from Isaiah 19:18, the prophecy of the propagation of the true religion in Egypt seems to point to the flourishing state of Judaism in that country, in consequence of the great favor shown to the Jews by the Ptolemies. Alexander himself settled a great many Jews in his new city Alexandria, granting them privileges equal to those of the Macedonians. The first Ptolemy, called Soter, carried great numbers of them thither, and gave them such encouragement that still more of them were collected there from different parts; so that Philo reckons that in his time there were a million of Jews in that country. These worshipped the God of their fathers; and their example and influence must have had a great effect in spreading the knowledge and worship of the true God through the whole country. See Bp. Newton on the Prophecies, Dissert. xii.

Verse 1

The burden of Egypt - That is, the prophet's declaration concerning Egypt.

Verse 3

They shall seek to the idols, and to the charmers, and to them that have familiar spirits, and to the wizards - And they shall ask their symulacres, and their debynouris, and their devyl clepers, and their devyl sacristers. - Old Bible. The import of the original words has already been given where they occur in the Pentateuch. See Deuteronomy 18:10, etc.

Verse 4

A cruel lord - Cruel lords - Nebuchadnezzar in the first place, and afterwards the whole succession of Persian kings, who in general were hard masters, and grievously oppressed the country. Note, that for "kasheh" (kasheh), lord, a MS. reads "kashim" (kashim), lords, agreeable to which is the rendering of the Septuagint, Syriac, and Vulgate.

Verse 5

The river shall be wasted and dried up - The Nile shall not overflow its banks; and if no inundation, the land must become barren. For, as there is little or no rain in Egypt, its fertility depends on the overflowing of the Nile.

Verse 6

Shall turn the rivers far away - Shall become putrid - "heeznichu" (heeznichu). This sense of the word, which Simonis gives in his Lexicon, from the meaning of it in Arabic, suits the place much better than any other interpretation hitherto given; and that the word in Hebrew had some such signification, is probable from 2 Chronicles 29:19, where the Vulgate renders it by pollut, polluted, and the Targum, by profaned, and made abominable, which the context in that place seems plainly to require. The form of the verb here is very irregular; and the rabbins and grammarians seem to give no probable account of it.

Verse 8

The fishers also - And the fishers - There was great plenty of fish in Egypt; see Numbers 11:5. The Nile, says Diodorus, lib. i., abounds with incredible numbers of all sorts of fish. And much more the lakes. So Egmont, Pococke, etc.

Verse 9

And the land of Judah - The threatening hand of God will be held out and shaken over Egypt, from the side of Judea; through which the Assyrians will march to invade it. It signifies that kind of terror that drives one to his wit's end, that causes him to reel like a drunken man, to be giddy through astonishment. Such is the import of $x-x'$ (chag), and $x-x'x'$ (chagah). Five MSS. and two editions have $x\phi x-x'x'$ (lechagah).

Verse 18

The city of destruction - The city of the sun - $x\phi x^{TM}x''x''x''x_i$ (ir hacheres). This passage is attended with much difficulty and obscurity. First, in regard to the true reading. It is well known that Onias applied it to his own views, either to procure from the king of Egypt permission to build his temple in the Hieropolitan Nome, or to gain credit and authority to it when built; from the notion which he industriously propagated, that Isaiah had in this place prophesied of the building of such a temple. He pretended that the very place where it should be built was expressly named by the prophet, $x\phi x^{TM}x''x''x''x_i$ (ir hacheres), the city of the sun. This possibly may have been the original reading. The present text has $x\phi x^{TM}x''x''x''x_i$ (ir haheres), the city of destruction; which some suppose to have been introduced into the text by the Jews of Palestine afterwards, to express their detestation of the place, being much offended with this schismatical temple in Egypt. Some think the latter to have been the true reading, and that the prophet himself gave this turn to the name out of contempt, and to intimate the demolition of this Hieropolitan temple; which in effect was destroyed by Vespasian's orders, after that of Jerusalem, - Videtur propheta consulto scripsisse $x''x''x_i$ (heres), pro $x-x''x_i$ (cheres), ut alibi scribitur $x'x^{TM}x^a x\phi x^Y$ (beith aven pro $x'x^{TM}x^a x\phi x$ (beith El): $x\phi x^{TM}x\phi x'x\phi x^a$ (ish bosheth) for $x\phi x^{TM}x\phi x'x\phi x\phi x$ (ish baal), etc. Vide Lowth in loc. - Secker. - It seems that the prophet designedly wrote $x''x''x_i$ (heres), destruction, for $x-x''x_i$ (cheres), the sun: as elsewhere $x'x^{TM}x^a x\phi x^Y$ (beith aven), the house of iniquity, is written for $x'x^{TM}x^a x\phi x$ (beith El), the house of God; $x\phi x^{TM}x\phi x'x\phi x^a$ (ish bosheth) for $x\phi x^{TM}x\phi x'x\phi x\phi x$ (ish baal), etc. But on the supposition that $x\phi x^{TM}x''x''x''x_i$ (air haheres) is the true reading, others understand it differently. The word $x''x''x_i$ (heres) in Arabic signifies a lion; and Conrad Ikenius has written a dissertation (Dissert. Philol. Theol. XVI.) to prove that the place here mentioned is not Heliopolis, as it is commonly supposed to be, but Leontopolis in the Heliopolitan Nome, as it is indeed called in the letter, whether real or pretended, of Onias to Ptolemy, which Josephus has inserted in his Jewish Antiquities, lib. 13 c. 3. And I find that several persons of great learning and judgment think that Ikenius has proved the point beyond contradiction. See Christian. Muller. Satur. Observ. Philolog. Michaelis Bibliothecae Oriental, Part v., p. 171. But, after all, I believe that neither Onias, Heliopolis, nor Leontopolis has any thing to do with this subject. The application of this place of Isaiah to Onias's purpose seems to have been a mere invention, and in consequence of it there may perhaps have been some unfair management to accommodate the text to that purpose; which has been carried even farther than the Hebrew text; for the Greek version has here been either translated from a corrupted text, or wilfully mistranslated or corrupted, to serve the same cause. The place is there called ἡ πόλις ἡ δίκαιη , the city of righteousness; a name apparently contrived by Onias's party to give credit to their temple, which was to rival that of Jerusalem. Upon the whole, the true reading of the Hebrew text in this place is very uncertain; fifteen MSS. and seven editions have $x-x''x_i$ (cheres), the city of Hacheres, or, of the sun. So likewise Symmachus, the Vulgate, Arabic, Septuagint, and Complutensian. On the other hand, Aquila, Theodotion, and the Syriac read $x''x''x_i$ (heres), destruction; the Chaldee paraphrase takes in both readings.

The reading of the text being so uncertain, no one can pretend to determine what the city was that is here mentioned by name; much less to determine what the four other cities were which the prophet does not name. I take the whole passage from the 18th verse to the end of the chapter, to contain a general intimation of the future propagation of the knowledge of the true God in Egypt and Syria, under the successors of Alexander; and, in consequence of this propagation, of the early reception of the Gospel in the same countries, when it should be published to the world. See more on this subject in Prideaux's Connect. An. 145; Dr. Owen's Inquiry into the present state of the Septuagint Version, p. 41; and Bryant's Observations on Ancient History, p. 124. - L.

Verse 19

An altar to the Lord - $x'x'x\phi x^a$ (tsebaoth), - of hosts, - or (Yehovah tsebaoth), is added by eight MSS. of good repute, and the Syriac Version.

Verse 23

Shall there be a highway - Under the latter kings of Persia, and under Alexander, Egypt, Judea, and Assyria lived peaceably under the same government, and were on such friendly terms that there was a regular, uninterrupted intercourse between them, so that the Assyrian came into Egypt and the Egyptian into Assyria, and Israel became the third, i.e., was in strict union with the other two; and was a blessing to both, as affording them some knowledge of the true God, Isaiah 19:24.

Verse 25

Blessed be Egypt - Assyria - and Israel - All these countries shall be converted to the Lord. Concerning Egypt, it was said, Isaiah 18:7, that it should bring gifts to the Lord at Jerusalem. Here it is predicted, Isaiah 19:19, that there shall be an altar to the Lord in Egypt itself; and that they, with the Assyrians shall become the people of God with the Israelites. This remains partly to be fulfilled. These countries shall be all, and perhaps at no very distant time from this, converted to the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ.