

## HOW TO PRAY FOR OUR NATION

**19** The oracle concerning Egypt. Look! Jehovah rides upon a swift cloud and is coming to Egypt. The idols of Egypt tremble at his presence, and the hearts of the Egyptians melt within them. <sup>2</sup>"I will stir up Egyptian against Egyptian—everyone shall fight against his brother, and everyone against his neighbor, city against city, kingdom against kingdom. <sup>3</sup>The spirit of the Egyptians will be demoralized within them. I will confound the counsel [of the nation], so they will resort to the idols and the spirits of the dead and the mediums and the spiritists. <sup>4</sup>Furthermore, I will hand the Egyptians over to a cruel master, a fierce king will rule over them," declares the Lord, Jehovah of hosts. <sup>5</sup>Furthermore, the waters of the River will dry up, and the riverbed will become parched and dry. <sup>6</sup>The canals will stink. The streams of Egypt will dwindle away and dry up. The reeds and rushes will wither. <sup>7</sup>The bulrushes along the Nile, by the edge of the Nile, and all the sown fields beside the Nile, will become parched, [the topsoil] will be blown away and vanish. <sup>8</sup>The fishermen will lament, and all those who cast their hooks into the Nile will mourn—those who spread their fishing nets upon the waters will pine away. <sup>9</sup>Furthermore, the manufacturers of linen made from combed flax and the weavers of white cloth will despair. <sup>10</sup>The [economic] pillars [of Egypt] will be broken in pieces; all the wage earners will be grieved in their souls. <sup>11</sup>The officials of Zoan are nothing but fools; the counsel given by Pharaoh's wisest counselors has become brutish. How can you say to Pharaoh, "I am one of the wise men, a disciple of the ancient kings"? <sup>12</sup>Now where are your wise men? Let them tell you and make known what Jehovah of hosts has planned with regard to Egypt. <sup>13</sup>The officials of Zoan have become fools, the leaders of Memphis are deluded—those who are the cornerstones of her tribes have led Egypt astray. <sup>14</sup>Jehovah has mixed within her a spirit of confusion; they have caused Egypt to go astray in everything she does. She is like a drunken man staggering around in his vomit. <sup>15</sup>There will be no help for Egypt, no help that head or tail, palm branch or reed can provide. <sup>16</sup>On that day the Egyptians will be like women. They will tremble with fear because of Jehovah of host's shaking fist that he shakes over them. <sup>17</sup>The land of Judah will become a terror to Egypt; everyone to whom Judah is mentioned will be afraid, because of what Jehovah of hosts has planned against them.

<sup>18</sup>On that day five of Egypt's cities will speak the language of Canaan and swear [their vows] by Jehovah of hosts—one of them will be called The City of Destruction. <sup>19</sup>On that day there will be an altar to Jehovah in the heart of Egypt, and a monument to Jehovah at its border. <sup>20</sup>It will be a sign and a witness to Jehovah of hosts in the land of Egypt; for they will cry out to Jehovah because of their oppressors, and he will send them a savior and defender, and he will rescue them. <sup>21</sup>So Jehovah will make himself known to the Egyptians, and on that day the Egyptians will acknowledge Jehovah—indeed, they will worship with sacrifices and grain offerings, they will make vows to Jehovah and they will keep them. <sup>22</sup>Jehovah will strike Egypt—striking and healing. They will turn to Jehovah, and he will respond to their pleas and heal them. <sup>23</sup>On that day there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria. The Assyrians will go to Egypt and the Egyptians to Assyria, and the Egyptians and the Assyrians will worship together. <sup>24</sup>On that day Israel will be the third [nation], along with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth; <sup>25</sup>because Jehovah of hosts has blessed them, saying, "Blessed

*be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel my inheritance.”*  
(Isa. 19:1-25)

## **Introduction**

As a nation, we were becoming rapidly demoralized by our worldliness, our ambition, our vanity, and our vices. The true, the great end for which, we believe, this nation was raised up, was being lost sight of. The very foundations were moving. ... The country had been absorbed in the pursuit of pleasure and gain. Men were making haste to be rich, and to enjoy their riches. Recklessness of expenditure, extravagance in living ... had attained a height unexampled in the previous social history of our country, and utterly inconsistent with the simplicity and virtue of our fathers. (Samuel L. Prime, *The Power of Prayer*, The Banner of Truth Trust, p. 1)

Such were the apprehensions expressed by astute Christian people as they considered the state of their nation, the United States of America, back in the year 1857. They were concerned that this republic would suffer the fate of all past republics; with fear and trepidation they were convinced that the LORD must soon visit the nation.

Visit He did, in what might best be described by the words of Isaiah 19:22, *“striking and healing,”*

The autumn of 1857 was signalized by a sudden and fearful convulsion in the commercial world. ... the hand of God is suddenly laid upon city and country, the sources of prosperity dried up, fortunes taking to themselves wings ... the financial storm ... a commercial crisis ... was acknowledged to be a judgment. The justice of God was confessed in arresting men in recklessness, extravagance and folly. Thousands were thrown out of business. (Samuel L. Prime, *The Power of Prayer*, The Banner of Truth Trust, pp.1-2)

The LORD’s visitation upon America in the years 1857 and following was very much the same as His visitation upon ancient Egypt as described in the 19<sup>th</sup> chapter of Isaiah. This passage of Scripture informs us that the LORD, as the God of all the earth, sometimes chooses to visit a nation with both *“striking”* and *“healing.”* As we consider this 19<sup>th</sup> chapter of Isaiah, let us be instructed as to how to pray for our nation.

## **I. Pray that the LORD would Visit the Nation with “Healing,” Not Just “Striking” (Isa. 19:1-15,22)**

In verse 1 the announcement is made that the LORD is about to visit Egypt, and the effect of His coming is stated as follows: *“The idols of Egypt tremble at his presence, and the hearts of the Egyptians melt within them.”* Every unholy spirit flees and all human strength is dissolved when men have a direct encounter with the LORD God, the Almighty. In the nations of the Western World at present there

is a very low view of God. Men have sought to regulate Him out of public life, confining Him to the life of private devotions and the distant recesses of heaven, speaking His Name only in blasphemy, if at all—but when the LORD shall make Himself known, that will all be changed.

The LORD declares that He will create a situation of internal strife, even civil war: *“I will stir up Egyptian against Egyptian—everyone shall fight against his brother, and everyone against his neighbor, city against city, kingdom against kingdom”* (vs. 2.) Here is a reference to the political and social upheaval that characterized Egypt at this particular time in history (approximately 745-712 B.C.)

The effect of this internal strife on the national life is now described in verse 3. The national spirit of unity, self-confidence and optimism will be drained and disappear: *“the spirit of the Egyptians will be demoralized within them.”* The LORD further declares that He will *“confound the counsel [of the nation].”* The political efforts to bring unity, stability, and re-vitalization to the nation will be thwarted and come to nothing. When mere human endeavor proves to be futile, the nation will turn to its idols and to the occult: *“so they will resort to the idols and the spirits of the dead and the mediums and the spiritists”*

The LORD further declares that He will give the nation into the hands of *“a cruel master, a fierce king will rule over them”* (vs. 4.) The reference is to a national despot and his successors who came to power at this time; as the commentators Keil & Delitzsch explain:

“Kingdom against kingdom:” this exactly suits those twelve small kingdoms into which Egypt was split up after the overthrow of the Ethiopian dynasty in the year 695, until Psammetichus ... succeeded in the year 670 in uniting these twelve states once more under a single monarchy. This very Psammetichus (and the royal house of Psammetichus generally) is the cruel ruler, the fierce king ... The Egyptian nation very soon came to feel how oppressive this new dynasty was, when Necho (616-597 B.C.), the son and successor of Psammetichus, renewed the project of Ramses-Miamun, to construct a Suez canal, and tore away 120,000 of the natives of the land from their homes, sending them to wear out their lives in forced labor of the most wearisome kind. (*Commentaries on the Old Testament, Isaiah*, Vol. I, pp.356-357)

In verses 5-10 Isaiah goes on to describe the natural and economic calamities that, at the command of God, befell the nation of Egypt. *“The waters of the River will dry up, and the riverbed will become parched and dry. The canals will stink. The streams of Egypt will dwindle away and dry up. The reeds and rushes will wither”* (vs. 5-6.) Here is the description of a severe drought; as the Nile River recedes, its tributaries dry up, becoming foul-smelling swamps. Verse 7 describes the effects of the drought on the countryside: *“The bulrushes along the Nile, by the*

*edge of the Nile, and all the sown fields beside the Nile, will become parched, [the topsoil] will be blown away and vanish.*" The meadows and all the cultivated fields become dry and barren. Verses 8-9 describe the effects of the drought upon the economy at large: *"The fishermen will lament, and all those who cast their hooks into the Nile will mourn—those who spread their fishing nets upon the waters will pine away. <sup>9</sup>Furthermore, the manufacturers of linen made from combed flax and the weavers of white cloth will despair."* The fishermen lament the fact that they have no catch of fish, while the textile workers are thrown out of work owing to the lack of flax from which to make textile products. Verse 10 describes the final effects of the drought: *"The [economic] pillars [of Egypt] will be broken in pieces; all the wage earners will be grieved in their souls."* The pillars of Egypt being broken is a reference to the total collapse of the economy; while the reference to the grief stricken laborers points to the massive amount of unemployment—what is described here is a great depression.

In this time of intense strife and economic crisis, the wisdom of Egypt totally fails, as is revealed in verses 11-15. Not only are the leaders dumbfounded to find solutions—*"The officials of Zoan are nothing but fools; the counsel given by Pharaoh's wisest counselors has become brutish"* (vs. 11a;) their mismanagement is responsible for much of the suffering, as verse 13 indicates: *"The officials of Zoan have become fools, the leaders of Memphis are deluded—those who are the cornerstones of her tribes have led Egypt astray."* In verse 14 the Egyptian nation is described as a drunken man staggering about aimlessly; and it is the LORD who has mixed the strong, intoxicating drink that the nation has imbibed through the counsel of its befuddled leaders. As a form of judgment, God gave them up to the foolishness of their own sinful hearts and caused them to reap the fruit of their own ungodly devices. Verse 15 describes the outcome of this pitiable state of affairs: *"There will be no help for Egypt, no help that head or tail, palm branch or reed can provide."* No one can accomplish anything; no one can offer the solution to the dilemma of the nation. As the famous Egyptian historian, James Breasted, wrote: "The hopeless state of the country was clearly understood by ... Isaiah." Referring to Isaiah chapter 19, Breasted states, "No truer picture could possibly be portrayed" (*A History of Egypt*, p.548.)

But, as verse 22 points out, in His mercy and by His sovereign grace, the LORD chose to visit Egypt not only with *"striking,"* but also with *"healing."* As a consequence, *"They will turn to Jehovah, and he will respond to their pleas and heal them."*

As we pray for a nation that is susceptible to God's righteous judgment, let us pray that the LORD would see fit to visit the nation not only with *"striking,"* but also with *"healing."*

## **II. Pray that the LORD would Bring Many to Christ the Savior (Isa. 19:16-25)**

Verses 16-17 inform us that a holy fear of the LORD seizes the nation:

*On that day the Egyptians will be like women. They will tremble with fear because of Jehovah of host's shaking fist that he shakes over them. <sup>17</sup>The land of Judah will become a terror to Egypt; everyone to whom Judah is mentioned will be afraid, because of what Jehovah of hosts has planned against them. (Isa. 19:16-17)*

The Egyptians shall tremble because of the LORD of hosts shaking His fist in righteous anger over them.

How do they discern that it is the hand of the LORD? They are able to do so by the witness of their Jewish neighbors. There was a continual interaction with the nation of Judah, and there were Jewish colonies in Egypt dating back to the 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C.

This fear of the LORD would result in conversions to the LORD. The first step to conversion is conviction—the initial work of the Holy Spirit is the work of conviction, note John 16:8. Speaking of the Holy Spirit, the Lord Jesus declares, *“When he comes, he will convict the world about sin, and about righteousness, and about judgment.”* Consider this same work of God as it occurred in mid-nineteenth century America:

Persons of the most vicious and abandoned character, supposed to be beneath and beyond the reach of all religious influence, ... were brought to humble themselves like little children at the foot of the cross. (*The Power of Prayer*, p.26)

In the hidden depths of the heart, thousands then carried convictions of guilt, such as they had never experienced before, and some who had even despised religion felt strongly attracted to some of its simplest appointments. (*The Power of Prayer*, p.61)

Let us pray earnestly and confidently for another such visitation of God in His mercy and grace and redeeming power.

According to verse 18, *“On that day five of Egypt's cities will speak the language of Canaan and swear their vows by Jehovah of hosts—one of them will be called The City of Destruction.”* A relatively small proportion of the population is genuinely converted (*“five cities,”*) but in the midst of this great pagan land of Egypt it is a real and substantial work of grace. One of those cities is called *“The city of Destruction.”* This is probably a poetic and symbolic way of speaking about the power and depths of God's work of grace in Egypt at this time, since there is in Hebrew a play on words here. The Hebrew word for destruction (הָרָס) is closely related to the Hebrew word for sun (שֶׁרָס); and the sun was one of the chief deities of Egypt. Thus, there is here a testimony to the depths of God's work of



grace in Egypt by depicting the revival as overthrowing the very center of the chief deity of Egypt. Again, consider this same great work of God as it occurred in mid-nineteenth century America:

About this time religious interest in New York and vicinity had become very deep, and ... few could be found who were not more or less anxious with reference to the salvation of the soul. (*The Power of Prayer*, p. 61)

Prayer meetings almost simultaneously were established in all parts of the land, both in city and country—Boston, Baltimore, Washington, Richmond, Charleston, Savannah, Mobile, New Orleans, Vicksburg, Memphis, St. Louis, Pittsburgh, Cincinnati, Chicago, and other cities, shared in this glorious work. The whole land received the “spiritual rain.” ... the newspapers, both secular and religious, in all parts of the country, speak of an “unwonted [i.e., unusual or extraordinary] revival of religion” in all quarters, far and near ... The northern, middle, western and southern States were moved as by one common mighty influence. The spirit of revival spread everywhere, and seemed to permeate every nook and corner of the great republic. The subjects of the revival included all classes—the high and the low—the rich and the poor—the learned and the ignorant. The most hopeless and forbidding were brought under its almighty power. From the highest to the lowest and most degraded in society, the trophies of God’s power and grace were made. (*The Power of Prayer*, pp.25-26)

Let us pray that the LORD will be gracious to visit this nation again in the same extraordinary way.

Verses 19-20a describe the evidence and effects of this work of grace among the people of the land: *“On that day there will be an altar to Jehovah in the heart of Egypt.”* In the very heart of this pagan land there will be those who are converted to the LORD, and who openly profess His great name and the religion of His people Israel. *“On that day there will be ... a monument to Jehovah at its border. <sup>20</sup>It will be a sign and a witness to Jehovah of hosts in the land of Egypt.”* Here is an acknowledgement of their allegiance to the LORD and their oneness with His people Israel.

A further result of this work of grace throughout the land is the preservation and restoration of the Egyptian nation: *“[Jehovah] ... will send them a savior and defender, and he will rescue them”* (vs. 20c.) This is a reference to the Egyptian leader, Psamtik (663-610 B.C.), who delivered his people from the oppression of the Assyrians; as verse 20b indicates, *“because they will cry out to Jehovah because of their oppressors.”* This national deliverance was granted by the LORD in answer to the prayers of the newly converted on behalf of their country.

As we pray for a nation that is susceptible to God's righteous judgment, let us pray that the LORD, in His mercy, would be pleased to do among us a great work of grace that will bring many to Christ the Savior.

## **Conclusion**

Some passages of Scripture call us to look inwardly to examine our personal lives; others, like this one presently before us, call us to look outwardly to see how God deals with nations. This present passage of Scripture informs us that the LORD, as the God of all the earth, sometimes chooses to visit a nation not only with "*striking*" in righteous judgment, but also with "*healing,*" dispensing His grace and converting many unto His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Let us pray earnestly and confidently that when the LORD visits our nation, He would be merciful to visit not with "*striking*" alone, but also with "*healing.*"