

# OpenTheo

## November 6th: Isaiah 19 & Mark 13:14-37

November 5, 2021



### Alastair Roberts

An oracle for Egypt. The coming of the Son of Man.

My reflections are searchable by Bible chapter here:  
<https://audio.alastairadversaria.com/explore/>.

If you are interested in supporting this project, please consider supporting my work on Patreon (<https://www.patreon.com/zugzwanged>), using my PayPal account (<https://bit.ly/2RLaUcB>), or buying books for my research on Amazon ([https://www.amazon.co.uk/hz/wishlist/ls/36WVSWCK4X330?ref\\_=wl\\_share](https://www.amazon.co.uk/hz/wishlist/ls/36WVSWCK4X330?ref_=wl_share)).

You can also listen to the audio of these episodes on iTunes:  
<https://itunes.apple.com/gb/podcast/alastairs-adversaria/id1416351035?mt=2>.

## Transcript

Isaiah chapter 19, an oracle concerning Egypt. And they will inquire of the idols and the sorcerers, and the mediums and the necromancers. And I will give over the Egyptians into the hand of a hard master, and a fierce king will rule over them, declares the Lord God of hosts.

And the waters of the sea will be dried up, and the river will be dry and parched, and its canals will become foul, and the branches of Egypt's Nile will diminish and dry up. Reeds and rushes will rot away. There will be bare places by the Nile, on the brink of the Nile, and all that is sown by the Nile will be parched, will be driven away, and will be no more.

The fishermen will mourn and lament, all who cast a hook in the Nile, and they will languish who spread nets on the water. The workers in combed flacks will be in despair, and the weavers of white cotton. Those who are the pillars of the land will be crushed, and all who work for pay will be grieved.

The princes of Zohan are utterly foolish. The wisest counsellors of Pharaoh give stupid counsel. How can you say to Pharaoh, I am a son of the wise, a son of ancient kings?

Where then are your wise men? Let them tell you that they might know what the Lord of hosts has purposed against Egypt.

The princes of Zohan have become fools, and the princes of Memphis are deluded. Those who are the cornerstones of her tribes have made Egypt stagger. The Lord has mingled within her a spirit of confusion, and they will make Egypt stagger in all its deeds, as a drunken man staggers in his vomit.

And there will be nothing for Egypt that head or tail, pambanch or reed may do. In that day the Egyptians will be like women, and tremble with fear before the hand that the Lord of hosts shakes over them. And the land of Judah will become a terror to the Egyptians.

Everyone to whom it is mentioned will fear because of the purpose that the Lord of hosts has purposed against them. In that day there will be five cities in the land of Egypt that speak the language of Canaan, and swear allegiance to the Lord of hosts. One of these will be called the city of destruction.

In that day there will be an altar to the Lord in the midst of the land of Egypt, and a pillar to the Lord at its border. It will be a sign and a witness to the Lord of hosts in the land of Egypt. When they cry to the Lord because of oppressors, He will send them a saviour and defender and deliver them.

And the Lord will make Himself known to the Egyptians. And the Egyptians will know the Lord in that day, and worship with sacrifice and offering. And they will make vows to the Lord and perform them.

And the Lord will strike Egypt, striking and healing. And they will return to the Lord, and He will listen to their pleas for mercy and heal them. In that day there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria.

And Assyria will come into Egypt, and Egypt into Assyria. And the Egyptians will worship with the Assyrians. In that day Israel will be the third with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth, whom the Lord of hosts has blessed, saying, Blessed be Egypt, my people, and Assyria, the work of my hands, and Israel, my inheritance.

Isaiah chapters 18-20 concern Cush and Egypt. Chapter 18 addressed Cush, and in chapter 19 we turn to Egypt. As Assyria rose to dominance in the region, Judah was tempted to look south to Egypt for support against the great threat that Assyria posed.

In chapters 30 and 31 this temptation will be dealt with more directly. Although dating this material is difficult, it is probable that the same concern underlies chapters 18-20, which also demonstrate the unreliability of Cush and Egypt as nations to rely upon. Some have suggested that we should connect the opening part of this chapter with the situation described in the preceding chapter, presumably referring to Cush taking over

Upper and Lower Egypt, and the foundation of the Cushite or Nubian-ruled 25th dynasty.

However, much of the material of this chapter has a more figurative character to it. Egypt is, of course, prominent in the story of Israel. In Genesis chapter 12, Abraham had gone down into Egypt during a famine.

Later on in the book of Genesis, Joseph was sent down into Egypt by his brothers in chapter 37. Later his brothers and family joined him. There they settled in the land of Goshen, came to thrive, and then later as they were persecuted under pharaohs who did not know Joseph, the Lord delivered them in the Exodus, sending great plagues upon the Egyptians and drowning the pursuing Egyptians in the Red Sea.

While the northern powers relative to Israel and Judah were places like Assyria, Babylon, and Persia, the Egyptians were the great power to the south and consequently often needed to be prominent in the consideration of Israel and Judah's foreign policies. Presumably seeing it as a shrewd political maneuver, Solomon had married the daughter of Pharaoh. He had engaged in horse trading for Pharaoh within the region, something that the kings had been told not to do.

However, despite this marriage alliance, Pharaoh had sheltered some of Solomon's enemies, Hadad the Edomite and Jeroboam the son of Nebat. After Solomon's death, the kingdom divided, in part because Solomon had taken on something of the character of a pharaoh. His adversary, Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who had taken refuge in Egypt, returned to the land and took away the northern tribes from the rule of the house of David.

A few years after the division of the kingdom, Shishak the king of Egypt came up and attacked Jerusalem, plundering the treasures of the temple. While Egypt was not the same power that it once was during much of the period of the kingdoms, it did play an important role in the destiny of the kingdoms at some critical junctures. Hoshea, the last king of Israel before its fall, had turned to Egypt for aid against the Assyrians.

The Assyrians' vengeance for this led to the final destruction of the northern kingdom in 722 BC. During the reign of Hezekiah, Judah was also tempted to look to Egypt for aid against the rising Assyrian threat. Another pivotal event in which Egypt was involved in the history of the southern kingdom came about a century later when Pharaoh Necho, coming up to engage with the Assyrians, killed King Jeziel who was the last great hope for the nation.

He later removed King Jehoahaz, whom the people of Judah had set up as a replacement for his father, and put Eliakim, who he renamed Jehoiakim, in his place. He ruled as a vassal under Egypt. The Babylonians would soon crush the influence of the Egyptians within the region, driving them back within the borders of their land.

After the fall of Jerusalem and the assassination of the governor Gedaliah, many Jews fled to Egypt for refuge. As we read of individual Israelites who fled to Egypt for refuge, people like Jeroboam the son of Nebat, perhaps there were some small established communities of Israelites within the land of Egypt earlier on. The Jews who moved down at the time of Jeremiah were not going to thrive in the land of their exile.

Later communities of Jewish exiles, however, would. During the 5th and 4th centuries there was a large Jewish community at Elphantine who even built their own temple, although they seemed to have been polytheists in their practice and to have little or no knowledge of the law. Under Alexander and the Ptolemies, further communities of Jews would be established in Egypt.

At one point, over a third of the population of Alexandria was Jewish. They had a temple at Leontopolis and also translated the scriptures from Hebrew into Greek in the Septuagint in the 3rd century. Estimates of the population of Jews in Egypt by the 1st century AD can be as high as 1 million.

Considering the way that Isaiah chapter 19 speaks about the future of Egypt and the intertwining of its destiny with that of Israel, this history is important to consider. The chapter begins with the announcement of the Lord's advent. He is riding the storm cloud, common theophanic imagery, coming to Egypt to judge the idols.

The Lord's war against the false gods should be familiar from the background of the Exodus. The Egyptians' confidence would have been in their gods, their internal unity, the natural provision of the Nile and the wisdom of their leaders. In this chapter the Lord speaks of how he is going to frustrate all of these sources of strength.

Their idols and false gods will be dismayed. Their warriors will be sapped of courage. The nation would turn against itself.

They would be subject to the harsh bondage of another nation. Their river would dry up and all of the food that it offered and the industry that it supported would be removed with it. And the counsel of all of their wise men would be frustrated and proven foolish.

Egypt was a place of idolatry and superstition. And the Lord is going to judge the necromancers, the mediums, the idols and the sorcerers. There is a sort of poetic justice to the way that the Egyptians would be given into the hand of a hard master.

They had once been the hard master over Israel, but now they would be subject to harsh rule. Verses 5-10 with the various judgments upon the land should recall the plagues of the Exodus. The Nile was the great source of Egypt's life.

Without the Nile, Egypt would disappear. It would become entirely desert. Whether in Upper Egypt to the south with the Nile Valley or in the lower Egyptian area of the Nile Delta, Egypt was entirely dependent upon the Nile for its existence.

There would no longer be any fish for the fishermen. Those working with cotton and flax would no longer have the plants with which to make the clothes that they would sell. The vast fields of grain that were supported by the Nile, which would later make Egypt the breadbasket of Rome, would be parched and barren.

Egypt's life and economy would be utterly devastated. This passage is likely figurative, not a literal description of the Nile drying up, but of the Lord bringing the great and proud kingdom of Egypt down to the ground. This would be a great caution to those in Judah who attempted to trust in her.

Besides the internal unity, the gods, and the superstitions of Egypt, and the natural situation by the Nile, the Egyptians placed great faith in the wisdom of their rulers and their counsellors. The Lord, however, would frustrate these two, leaving them without any wisdom. The princes of Zohan, the key city in the north, and the wisest counsellors of Pharaoh would be incapable of giving good advice.

The same would be the case for the princes of Memphis, another key northern city. In a familiar prophetic image, we are told that Egypt would be made drunk. They would stagger and reel under the Lord's judgment.

No one in Egypt, from the greatest to the least of them, would be capable of responding to the crisis. The chapter ends, in verses 16-25, with five in-that-day oracles, the last four of which continue and bring to a higher expression the theme that we have already encountered of the bringing in of the nations after judgment. We saw this in places like Azar, chapter 18, verse 7, for instance.

At that time, tribute will be brought to the Lord of Hosts from a people tall and smooth, from a people feared near and far, a nation mighty and conquering, whose land the rivers divide, to Mount Zion, the place of the name of the Lord of Hosts. The first of the in-that-day statements, however, is a statement of judgment. If Egypt is going to be purified, it will be purified, like Judah, through judgment.

Egypt would be struck with terror, a terror caused by the land of Judah. The Egyptians, of course, had responded to the Israelites in this way during the period of the plagues and the exodus. This prophecy does not seem to have been literally fulfilled during the years that followed Isaiah.

It seems to be looking forward to a more eschatological situation, a situation connected to other such prophecies within the book of Isaiah. There were many cities in the land of Egypt, but the prophecy of verse 18 is that five of these cities would be so associated with Israel as to speak Hebrew. One of these five cities is singled out.

Many translations read it, the city of destruction. But it's likely that it should be read the city of the sun, identifying the city as Heliopolis. What was once a center of worship for

the pagan sun god Ra would become a Hebrew-speaking city for the worship of the Lord, just as Abraham had set up altars and pillars in the land of his wanderings in Canaan.

So an altar would be set up in the midst of Egypt, and a pillar at its border. Much as Israel had once called out to the Lord in their distress in Egypt, so the Egyptians would now be able to call out to the Lord because of their oppressors, and he would send them a savior. The term for savior here perhaps being a play upon the name Moses.

The Lord would deal with the Egyptians as his people. They would worship him, would sacrifice in offerings, and would make vows to him, and he would strike them and heal them. Much as Judah, they would return to the Lord through judgment.

Isaiah chapter 11 verse 16 read, Verses 23 to 25 describe a much more remarkable highway, a highway that will lead all the way from Egypt to Assyria, bringing the northern power of Assyria, the southern power of Egypt, and Israel in the center, together in the common activity of worshipping the Lord. John Goldingay speculates that perhaps the Lord chose Canaan as the site for his special people precisely because it is so suited for such a highway. It is the place that stands at the junction of Africa, Asia, and Europe.

If you are looking for a location from which something can spread out into the rest of the world, the land of Canaan is the ideal place to start. This would be a fulfillment of the promise of the Lord that he would bless all of the nations through Abraham. The Lord speaks of Egypt and Assyria in language that is similar to that of which he speaks of Israel.

Israel, the Lord's firstborn son, would be joined by other sons. All of this fulfills the promise of Isaiah chapter 2 verses 2 to 3. For out of Zion shall go forth the law and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He shall judge between the nations and shall decide disputes for many peoples.

And they shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nations shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. The Lord would bring judgment upon Egypt, but judgment would not be the final word.

A question to consider. What are some of the former ways in which the Lord blessed Egypt through his people and some of the former indications that God had a good purpose for them as a nation? Mark chapter 13 verses 14 to 37. And let the one who is in the field not turn back to take his cloak.

And alas for women who are pregnant and for those who are nursing infants in those days! Pray that it may not happen in winter. For in those days there will be such tribulation as has not been from the beginning of the creation that God created until now, and never will be. And if the Lord had not cut short the days, no human being

would be saved.

But for the sake of the elect, whom he chose, he shortened the days. And then if anyone says to you, Look, here is the Christ, or, Look, there he is, do not believe it. For false Christs and false prophets will arise, and perform signs and wonders to lead astray, if possible, the elect.

But be on guard. I have told you all things beforehand. But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.

And then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. And then he will send out the angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven. From the fig tree learn its lesson.

As soon as its branch becomes tender and puts out its leaves, you know that summer is near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates. Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.

Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. But concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Be on guard.

Keep awake. For you do not know when the time will come. It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his servants in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to stay awake.

Therefore stay awake. For you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or in the morning, lest he come suddenly and find you asleep. And what I say to you, I say to all, stay awake.

In Mark 13, Jesus is addressing his disciples' question about when the destruction of the temple that he foretold would occur. A critical sign of this is the abomination of desolation that Daniel foretold in Daniel chapter 9 verses 24 to 27. The abomination of desolation is the abomination that provokes the desolation of the temple, not the desolation of the temple itself.

Abominations are typically performed by Israel itself. It is the perversion of the bride. It is not the sin of the nations.

In the Old Testament it could be seen in the sins of the sons of Eli, for instance, or the idolatry of the nation in Ezekiel's day. The abomination of the temple, then, is caused by flagrant sin and or apostasy. And the more specific reference to the abomination of desolation is found in Daniel chapter 11 verses 30 to 35.

And the abomination that makes desolate. For it still awaits the appointed time. In Daniel chapter 11, the king is Antiochus Epiphanes, an early 2nd century BC Hellenistic ruler of the Seleucid Empire.

Yet the abomination of desolation is not directly set up by him, but by forces aligned with him, which may be those who are described as forsaking the Holy Covenant. I believe it is the apostate Jews, particularly the high priests, Jason and Menelaus, who are the ones who set up the abomination that makes desolate. In around 168 BC.

This also is connected with Daniel chapter 9 verses 24 to 27. And the people of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. His end shall come with a flood, and to the end there shall be war.

Desolations are decreed, and he shall make a strong covenant with many for one week. And for half of the week he shall put an end to sacrifice and offering to the Lord. And on the wing of abominations shall come one who makes desolate, until the decreed end is poured out on the desolator.

So we have an earlier desolation, or an earlier abomination of desolation, in the time of Antiochus Epiphanes and the Maccabees. And now we have a later one that's being foretold, and I believe this is the one that Jesus is referring to. The events in AD 70.

And I think there's a candidate described in Josephus. In the Jewish War, Book 4, Chapter 3, he writes of the Zealots. They did not well know what the high priesthood was, such a mere rustic was he.

Yet did they hail this man, without his own consent, out of the country, as if they were acting a play upon the stage, and adorned him with a counterfeit face. They also put upon him the sacred garments, and upon every occasion instructed him what he was to do. This horrid piece of wickedness was sport and pastime with them, but occasioned the other priests, who at a distance saw their law made a jest of, to shed tears, and sorely lament the dissolution of such a sacred dignity.

I believe this could be connected to the man of lawlessness mentioned in 2 Thessalonians, Chapter 2, verses 1-12. And at this point, when the disciples saw the abomination of desolation set up, the utter perversion of the high priesthood, they were supposed to flee. And it was a good time to flee, because it was just before the Zealots summoned the Idumeans to attack the city.

At this point, the Jerusalem Christians fled to the mountains, to Pella in the Transjordan. Eusebius, in his Ecclesiastical History, Book 3, Chapter 5, writing in the early 4th century, writes, But the people of the church in Jerusalem had been commanded by a revelation, vouchsafed to approve men there before the war, to leave the city and to dwell in a certain town of Perea, called Pella. And when those that believed in Christ had come



there from Jerusalem, then, as if the royal city of the Jews and the whole land of Judea were entirely destitute of holy men, the judgment of God at length overtook those who had committed such outrages against Christ and his apostles, and totally destroyed that generation of impious men.

But the number of calamities which everywhere fell upon the nation at that time, the extreme misfortunes to which the inhabitants of Judea were especially subjected, the thousands of men, as well as women and children, that perished by the sword, by famine, and by other forms of death innumerable, all these things, as well as the great many sieges that were carried on against the cities of Judea, and the excessive sufferings endured by those that fled to Jerusalem itself, as to a city of perfect safety, and finally the general course of the whole war, as well as its particular occurrences in detail, and how at last the abomination of desolation proclaimed by the prophets stood in the very temple of God, so celebrated of old, the temple which was now awaiting its total and final destruction by fire, all these things, anyone that wishes, may find accurately described in the history written by Josephus. But it is necessary to state that this writer records that the multitude of those who were assembled from all Judea at the time of the Passover, to the number of three million souls, were shut up in Jerusalem as in a prison, to use his own words, for it was right that in the very days in which they had inflicted suffering upon the Saviour and the benefactor of all, the Christ of God, that in those days, shut up as in a prison, they should meet with destruction at the hands of divine justice. Just as the perversion of the priesthood in the days of Antiochus Epiphanes led to judgment upon Jerusalem and its temple, so in A.D. 70 the perversion of the high priesthood again would lead to a similar fate.

The language of this passage seems so extreme and so cosmic that many people can't imagine it relating to anything other than the destruction of the universe on the last day. But it needn't be read this way. Those familiar with the Old Testament prophets will know that there are many similar passages that use the same sort of imagery to refer to judgments in history, judgments upon places like Egypt or Babylon.

Isaiah 13.10 speaks of the destruction of Babylon. And again in Isaiah 34.4 Ezekiel 32.7-8 speaks of Egypt. We need to be alert to the fact that the fall of Jerusalem is being described like the fall of Babylon and Egypt.

Later in Revelation Jerusalem will be spoken of as Babylon the Great. We focus upon the coming of the Son of Man often as a downward movement from heaven towards earth. But it is the coming of the Son of Man into heaven itself that is in view here.

The background is that of Daniel again. Daniel 7.9-14 Daniel 7.9-14 Daniel 7.9-14 Daniel 7.9-14 The sign of the coming then is the vindication of the exalted Son of Man by the dispossession of the wicked tenants. They shall see this coming in the sense of the proof of it.

It will be demonstrated in the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple. All of this is about establishing the new age of the kingdom. The angels or literally the messengers will then be sent out to gather from the four winds.

It is a new beginning. It is a new covenant order being established. This is referring I think to places like Deuteronomy 30.4 If your outcasts are in the uttermost parts of heaven, from there the Lord your God will gather you, and from there He will take you.

God is going to gather all of His children. See the same thing in Isaiah 27.13 And in that day a great trumpet will be blown, and those who were lost in the land of Assyria, and those who were driven out to the land of Egypt, will come and worship the Lord on the holy mountain at Jerusalem. After this Jesus speaks of the fig tree.

He has connected the fig tree with Israel earlier. They will see these signs and they should recognise that the time has come. That generation will not pass away until everything has occurred.

There is a time limit on this. Within about 40 years of the time Jesus is speaking, everything will have taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away but His words will not.

This maybe refers to Isaiah 51.6 Lift up your eyes to the heavens and look at the earth beneath, for the heavens vanish like smoke, the earth will wear out like a garment, and they who dwell in it will die in like manner. But my salvation will be forever, and my righteousness will never be dismayed. Recognising the fulfilment of Jesus' words in AD 70 and the specific detail that He gave to His disciples to flee at a crucial moment, we should see that Jesus is not a false prophet.

Jesus is not someone who foretold an eschaton that never occurred. This all took place and He prepared His disciples for it. And as Eusebius recounts, they took that preparation and escaped the great and terrible fate that was suffered by Jerusalem and the people within it.

Jesus concludes the teaching of this passage of the Olivet Discourse by focusing upon the absolute necessity of watchfulness and wakefulness. Everything will seem to be going on as it always has, and then suddenly everything changes in a single day. Your entire world order, everything you thought to be so rock solid and certain, collapses.

When the master of the house comes, the servants have to be ready for him. They cannot predict the time of the Son of Man's coming, but the signs will be there for the watchful and the faithful and the wakeful servants. They are called to be such servants, and they are reminded again and again because this is of paramount importance.

A question to consider. The theme of wakefulness is very prominent at the end of this passage. Where else can we see such a theme within the New Testament? And how can it give us an insight into the way that the early disciples saw themselves and how we

should see ourselves?