

Egypt as God's People: Isaiah 19:19–25 and Its Allusions to the Exodus

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Introduction

Isaiah 19:19–25 provides an overview of God's relationship with Egypt and, more particularly, portrays the Egyptians as God's people. God will hear their cry and will send a savior to deliver them. Reading these concluding verses of Isa 19, one is struck by the question: How do the allusions to Exod 3 in Isa 19:19–25 contribute to the meaning of the latter? Currently, there is a lack of detailed exegetical-intertextual¹ study of the allusions in Isa 19:19–25 from the perspective of a contextual reading of the book of Isaiah and the prophet's use of the historical ideas in Exodus to communicate to the people of his time.²

¹An exegetical-intertextual method will be used in this study to examine the use of allusion, meaning that I will use contextual analysis of both Isaiah and Exodus to explore the allusions in the specified passages in each of these books. In this study, I define an allusion as a reference to a previous text that is determined by contextual, literary, and linguistic markers.

Michael Fishbane uses the term "inner-biblical exegesis" (equivalent to "exegetical-intertextuality") to refer to the concept of allusion between two passages. He also delineates scribal, legal, aggadic, and mantological exegesis as categories for classifying references to texts in other portions of the Bible (*Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1985], 1–19). Further developing Fishbane's concept, Benjamin D. Sommer sees "intertextual" and "allusion" to be distinct: "Intertextuality is synchronic in its approach, influence or allusion diachronic or even historicist. Intertextuality is interested in a very wide range of correspondences among texts, influence and allusion with a more narrow set. Intertextuality examines the relations among many texts, while influence and allusion look for specific connections between a limited number of texts" (*A Prophet Reads Scriptures: Allusion in Isaiah 40–66* [Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998], 8).

As defined by Jon Paulien, "An 'outright allusion' assumes the author's intention to point the reader to a previous work as a means of expanding the reader's horizons. The portion of the text alluded to can only be fully understood in light of its context within the original work" ("Elusive Allusion: The Problematic Use of the Old Testament in the Book of Revelation," *BR* 33 [1988]: 39). My approach will also incorporate the following, more concise definition by David R. Klinger: "A literary allusion is a literary device utilized by an author whereby textual markers are placed into the alluding text (i.e., developing textual meaning) in order to activate meaning in a prior alluded text (i.e., the stable textual meaning of a previous text) so that the rhetorical relationship between the two contexts can be determined and the meaning created by the allusion can then be imported into the author's developing textual meaning" ("Validity in the Identification and Interpretation of a Literary Allusion in the Hebrew Bible" [Ph.D. diss., Dallas Theological Seminary, 2010], 98).

²Some scholars view this pericope as having been written as late as the fourth century B.C.E. See Otto Kaiser, *Isaiah 13–39: A Commentary* (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1974), 105. For more information, see Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1–39* (AB 19; New York: Doubleday, 2000), 317–20.

Some scholars see a sharp contrast between the first and second sections of Isa 19 and view the second section as blessings being poured out on Egypt³ or as an implication that Judah should not turn toward Egypt for help because that nation will one day turn toward Judah's God.⁴ While these ideas are partially accurate, a bigger picture of this passage has been overlooked. This bigger picture is found in an understanding of the covenant⁵ and how Isaiah uses the Exodus framework to transmit his message. John Watts characterizes Isa 19:19–25 as referring to "God's will," "God's plan," and "God's strategy,"⁶ but this appears vague; he does not specify God's will or plan and what it encompasses. Finally, Hans Wildberger suggests that this unit "does not follow any consistent theme"; rather, the biblical author proceeds to move away from the reality of honor and goes beyond all limits by honoring Egypt.⁷ While Wildberger recognizes a concept of universalism,⁸ he does not demonstrate from where the author of this unit would have taken his view.⁹ It is apparent that there is no general consensus among scholars as to the use and application of the allusions in this passage.

The three questions to be pursued in this study are: What are the allusions to Exod 3 in Isa 19:19–25? How does Isa 19:19–25 adapt Exod 3? Finally, what are the implications of this adaptation for the meaning of Isa 19:19–25?

Overview of Isaiah 19:19–25

It is clear that the prophet's message in the first part of Isa 19 is against Egypt (Isa 19:1). However, from v. 16 to the end of the chapter, the tone of the message changes from a judging message to a redemptive message.¹⁰ The prophet

³Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah Volume 2: Chapters 19–39* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), 34.

⁴John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah Chapters 1–39* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 374–75; J. Alec Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction & Commentary* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1993), 166.

⁵The term "covenant" is used in this article to mean "a legally binding relationship contracted between two parties." See Roy Gane, "Covenant, Law, Sabbath," (syllabus, Andrews University, 1997), 15; Skip MacCarty, *In Granite or Ingrained?* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews University Press, 2007), 1. O. Palmer Robertson states that the "covenant is a bond in blood" (*The Christ of the Covenants* [Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1980], 4). Similarly, Gerhard E. Hasel and Michael G. Hasel define the divine covenant as follows: "a divinely initiated and sovereign-ordained relationship between God and man in which God as superior Lord graciously discloses, confirms, and fulfills the covenant promise," and "man, as beneficiary of the divine covenant gifts, freely accepts the enduring relationship and renders obedience to the divine obligations (commandments, statutes, laws, or ordinances) by the assisting and enabling grace provided by God" (*The Promise: God's Everlasting Covenant* [Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press, 2002], 18).

⁶John D. W. Watts, *Isaiah 1–33* (WBC 24; Waco: Word, 1985), 261.

⁷Hans Wildberger, *Isaiah 13–27* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 281–82.

⁸I am using the word "universal" in this article to mean that Israel is not the only nation eligible for salvation, but anyone of any nationality can be saved by the grace of God.

⁹However, Wildberger does appear to suggest that Isaiah may have taken his views from the Deuteronomist's writings.

¹⁰I say "v. 16 to the end of the chapter" not for the purpose of delimiting the literary structure but because of the clear literary differences between vv. 1–15 and vv. 16–25. Due to

addresses many different nations—including Ethiopia, Syria, Moab, Babylon, Assyria, Philistia, and Tyre—in the chapters surrounding ch. 19. All of them receive a message of judgment, as did Israel. However, unlike the judgment messages given to many of the other nations, the message of Isa 19:19–25 gives Egypt hope and assurance for the future.¹¹ This involves two factors: First, God is the one who extends hope and assurance to Egypt by revealing his sovereignty to a pagan nation. Second, this hope and assurance also requires a response on the part of the Egyptians. God initiates the redemptive act, but the Egyptians need to accept it. This is a call for relationship and partnership (cf. Deut 7:1–11).

Exegesis and Allusions of Isaiah 19:19–25 in Exodus

Isaiah 19:19–25 is narrative in genre. Its redemptive message is brief, summarized, and to the point. According to William Vogels, this literary unit is built around the concept of the covenant established at the time of the Exodus.¹² The following chart shows words used both in Isa 19:19–25 and in Exodus.

Isa 19:19–25	Exodus
מזבח <i>altar</i> & מצבה <i>pillar</i> (v. 19)	מזבח <i>altar</i> & מצבה <i>pillar</i> (Exod 24:4)
אֹת <i>sign</i> (v. 20)	הָאֹת <i>a sign</i> (Exod 3:12)
עַד <i>witness</i> (v. 20)	עַד <i>witness</i> (Exod 20:3)
יִצְעֲקוּ Qal imperf. 3 masc. pl. <i>they will cry out</i> (v. 20)	צִעֲקוּ, צִעֲקוּ <i>cry out</i> (Exod 3:7, 9)
לְחֹצִים <i>oppressors</i> (v. 20)	לְחֹצִים <i>oppressors</i> (Exod 3:9)
מוֹשִׁיעַ <i>deliverer, savior</i> (v. 20), and והצילם Hif. perf. 3 masc. sing. + 3 masc. pl. suff. <i>He will save them</i> . These two words are found together only here (v. 20).	לְהַצִּילוּ Hif. inf const. <i>to save</i> (Exod 3:8)
וְעַבְדוּ Qal perf. 3 com. pl. <i>and they will worship, serve</i> (v. 21)	תַּעֲבֹדוּ Qal imperf. 2 masc. pl. <i>you will worship, serve</i> (Exod 3:12; 4:23)
זֶבַח <i>sacrifice</i> (v. 21)	זֶבַח <i>sacrifice</i> (Exod 3:18; 5:3, 8)
וַיִּגַּף Qal perf. 3 masc. sing. <i>and he will strike, smite</i> (v.22)	וַיִּגַּף Qal part. masc. sing., וַיִּגַּף Qal inf. const. <i>strike, smite</i> (Exod 8:2 [Eng. 7:27]; 12:23, 27)
עַמִּי <i>my people</i> (v. 25)	עַמִּי <i>my people</i> (Exod 3:7, 10; 5:1; 7:4)

lack of space in this paper, I will not attempt to analyze the literary micro-structure of Isaiah 19.

¹¹Peter D. Miscall, *Isaiah* (2d ed.; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2006), 73.

¹²While William Vogels sees a literary structure in relation to Exodus, he only observes this for Isa 19:20b–21a (“L’Egypte mon Peuple - L’Universalisme d’Is 19:16–25,” *Biblica* 57 [1976]: 505). I have found that the intertextual references between Isa 19 and Exodus go beyond these two verses.

In Isa 19, the words “in that day” are used six times. In the specific verses that I am analyzing (vv. 19–25), this expression is employed four times (vv. 19, 21, 24, 25). This phrase does not refer to a period of time, as in the past or present, but rather to an overall period of indefinite time.¹³ Thus, this message reveals something that encompasses more than just the Egyptians during the time of Isaiah.

Through its use of the phrase “in that day,” Isa 19 conveys a covenantal message involving both the judgment and the grace of God. The covenantal message has been proclaimed previously in Isa 1, where God asks the people to come and “reason together with him,” including regarding judgment and grace aspects. Again, it is seen in Isa 6 where the holiness of God is revealed, while in Isa 7 Ahaz rejects trusting God, which is a breach of covenant. Thus, in Isaiah, Israel breaks the covenant by their behavior, but God does everything possible to reach them by bringing judgment upon them so that they can realize their need for God.

An echo of Isa 19:19 מזבח ליהוה בתוך ארץ מצרים, an “altar to the Lord in the midst of the land of Egypt,” is not found in Exod 3; however, the word “altar” is found in Exod 24:4, where Israel affirms the covenant earlier promised by God (Exod 19:3–6). This leads the reader to see a change of worship on the part of the Egyptians.¹⁴ Whereas they once worshiped other deities (cf. Exod 12:12; 32; Josh 24:14), they now accept the true God.¹⁵ This is a distinct change from the scenario in the book of Exodus and an irony, as the Pharaoh of the Exodus did not acknowledge God (Exod 5:1–5).

Earlier, Abraham erected an altar to God as an expression of “his gratitude and allegiance.”¹⁶ Now in Isa 19 an altar is raised as an acknowledgement of the true God. Furthermore, ומצבה אצל גבולה ליהוה, “and a pillar to the Lord at its border,” represents a monument stone, perhaps similar to an obelisk.¹⁷ In Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy, the Israelites were commanded to destroy altars and pillars of this sort (Exod 23:24; 34:13; Lev 26:1; Deut 7:5; 16:22).¹⁸

¹³Ludwig Koehler, Walter Baumgartner, and Johann Jakob Stamm, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (New York: Brill, 2000), 401.

¹⁴Trent C. Butler admits that the altar in Egypt is strange, since in Judean thinking the altar of God could only be situated in Jerusalem (*Isaiah* [HOTC; Nashville: Holman Reference, 2002], 128).

¹⁵Ronald E. Clements, *Isaiah 1–39* (NCBC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 171; Young, *Isaiah Volume 2*, 37; Gary V. Smith, *Isaiah 1–39* (NAC 15A; Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2007), 361; John Goldingay, *Isaiah* (NIBC 13; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2001), 120.

¹⁶Oswalt, *Isaiah Chapters 1–39*, 379.

¹⁷Young, *Isaiah Volume 2*, 38. Young also observes, “The word is derived from *nā-tzab*, to erect. In Canaanitish places of worship it stood as a sacred pillar, and in Scripture it is often mentioned in connection with the Asherim or other cult objects (Ex. 23:24; Lev. 26:1; Deut. 7:5; 1 Kings 14:23; 2 Kings 13:2; 2 Chron. 14:3; Hos. 3:4; Mic. 5:13)” (38 n. 62). Gary Smith observes also that the “great men of God built altars and pillars to commemorate great events in their lives (Gen 12:7–8; 28:18; Josh 4:8–9)” (*Isaiah 1–39*, 362).

¹⁸In Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy, the Israelites were asked to destroy the altars and pillars as they were conquering the land of Canaan because those altars and pillars were dedicated to foreign gods and were made with cut stone. By contrast, the altar and pillars erected by Jacob and Moses in Genesis and Exodus were made of uncut stone (Exod

However, in Genesis, Jacob erects a pillar to God¹⁹ (Gen 28:16–22; cf. 35:14; Hos 3:4) “as a memorial of divine revelation.”²⁰ Moreover, Gen 31:43–54 is closely related to Isa 19:19; Laban and Jacob make a covenant between them by setting an altar (מזבח) and a heap (גל) of stones for a border between their territories as a witness (עדה) (Gen 31:51–52; cf. Josh 22). In Exodus, Moses also erects an altar and twelve pillars at Mount Sinai (Exod 24:4). The altar and pillars at Mount Sinai are intertwined with the concept of the covenant relationship between God and God’s people. In Isa 19:19, this monument/pillar recognizes God’s presence there (cf. Isa 6:13).²¹

In the next verse (v. 20), the subject of the verb ויהיה is masculine singular, referring to the altar, which is also masculine singular in the previous verse. The subject of the verb does not refer to the pillar, since it is feminine singular, nor does it refer to the Lord, since the Lord is already the direct object in v. 20; however, the idea also encompasses the pillar. Both the altar and pillar will be a אות “sign” and a עד “witness” for the Lord in the land of Egypt. The אות “sign” in this context refers to “a reminder of duty”²² (see also Gen 9:12; 17:11; Exod 31:13–17; Deut 11:18), but it could also be an allusion to Exod 3:12, where God was known to be a sign because of bringing Israel out of Egypt.²³ However, here the pillar is raised as a sign of the Lord, a reminder of the Egyptians’ duty to the Lord. This sign is for the Egyptians, directed to the Lord, leading to the Lord, a sign for the surrounding nations to see the commitment that Egypt has made to follow God.

The second word, עד “witness,” suggests accountability and communication of the truth. How? Both the “altar and pillar” are the witnesses. The altar is a witness in the sense of revealing God’s grace, since the altar is the place where the sacrificial offering is offered (cf. Gen 8:20; Exod 20:24; 29:16–44; Lev 4). The pillar is also a witness because, like the altar, it serves as a symbol. Although no sacrificial offerings are performed on the pillars, nevertheless, because the word pillar comes after the word altar (cf. Exod 24:4; Deut 16:22; Hos 10:1–4), it suggests an interrelationship between these two words. Pillars are also set up to represent a basic monument of holiness and a place of worship or representation of God²⁴ but are not a full monument such as a temple (see Gen

20:25), and there is no indication that these were worshipped as were those of other nations as described in the passages in Leviticus and Deuteronomy.

¹⁹This goes back to a patriarchal period. Both Oswalt and Young also acknowledge that this refers to a patriarchal religion. See Oswalt, *Isaiah Chapters 1–39*, 379; Young, *Isaiah Volume 2*, 38.

²⁰David Stacey, *Isaiah 1–39* (London: Epworth Press, 1993), 124.

²¹Young, *Isaiah Volume 2*, 38; Clements, *Isaiah 1–39*, 172.

²²Koehler, Baumgartner, and Stamm, *Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon*, 26.

²³Oswalt and Herbert Wolf prefer to see the language of v. 20 as reminiscent of Judges (cf. Judg 3:9, 15; 6:7; 10:10) rather than Exodus. See Oswalt, *Isaiah Chapters 1–39*, 379; Herbert M. Wolf, *Interpreting Isaiah: The Suffering and Glory of the Messiah* (Grand Rapids: Academie Books, 1985), 125.

²⁴See Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1–39*, 319.

28:18, 22, cf. v. 11; 2 Kgs 10:26; 23:14).²⁵ In the context of the ברית ceremony, Joshua erects a stone (as a pillar) in the sanctuary of the LORD (Josh 24:26–27; cf. Gen 35:4) as a witness, meaning that the people have heard all the words of the LORD. Thus, the stone as a witness fulfills the same requirement as the reading of the Torah (Deut 31:9–13).²⁶ Both “sign” and “witness” are in the accusative of advantage with the word “Lord”; therefore, this witness reveals the character of God to the world.

Even though there is a judgment message in the first part of the chapter, God hears the Egyptians’ cry כִּי־יִצְעֲקוּ אֶל־יְהוָה (Isa 19:20), as God heard the Israelites’ cry in Egypt צַעֲקָה (Exod 3:7, 9) because of their oppressors לַחֲצִיִּם (Isa 19:20; cf. Exod 3:7, 9; 5:8, 15; 8:8; 14:10, 15). This is a clear allusion to Exodus, one that most commentators have apparently missed.²⁷ Isaiah’s message also includes a savior sent to deliver the Egyptians from their enemies. While the name of their rescuer is not mentioned, it appears that God himself will be their savior: “He will deliver them” (Isa 19:20; cf. Ps 106:21; Isa 43:3, 11; 45:15, 21; 49:26; 60:16; 63:8).²⁸ In Exodus, although Moses is asked to bring the Israelites out of Egypt, God is still the deliverer (Exod 3:8, 10).

There is another allusion between Isaiah and Exodus: וְהִצִּילֵם, “and he will rescue them” (Isa 19:20). There is a consistent image of God as a rescuer (cf. Gen 19:16–17, 20; Exod 3:8; Deut 23:14; Ps 40:13); however, while in Exodus the word מוֹשִׁיעַ is not used in reference to the redeeming action of God, Isaiah adds the word “savior” to define who does the rescuing. Thus Isaiah further reveals the nature of God and God’s salvific actions in this world.

In v. 21, similar allusions to Exodus continue to emerge. Isaiah 19:21 יהוה למצרים וידעו מצרים את־יהוה ביום ההוא ונודע יהוה אל־הים (Isa 19:21), “The Lord will make himself known to the Egyptians and they will know the Lord in that day,” alludes to Exodus 6:7 וידעתם כי אני יהוה אלהיכם (Exod 6:7), “and you will know that I am the Lord your God,” where God is known to the people of Israel whom he is redeeming.²⁹ Furthermore, ועבדו (Isa 19:21), “they will worship/serve,” alludes to Exodus (Exod 3:12; 4:23). In Hebrew thinking, to serve also meant to worship; therefore, this

²⁵Csaba Balogh, interpreting the מזבח and מצבה in “a context of echoing motifs common in Assyrian royal inscriptions,” writes, “[T]he altar of YHWH in Egypt was the symbol of Egypt’s submission to YHWH after Egypt became YHWH’s territory. . . . After YHWH defeated Egypt and the country had become his vassal, the מצבה, ‘the stele,’ identifies the new territory as his kingdom” (*The Stele of YHWH in Egypt: The Prophecies of Isaiah 18–20 concerning Egypt and Kush* [OTS 60; Boston: Brill, 2011], 258, 260).

²⁶See Johann Gamberoni, “מִצְבָּה,” *TDOT* 8:483–94.

²⁷A couple of exceptions (scholars who acknowledge a parallel to Exodus) are Hans Wildberger and Joseph Blenkinsopp. See Wildberger, *Isaiah 13–27*, 276; Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1–39*, 319.

²⁸According to Gary Smith, “There is no way to determine if this savior will be a man or a heavenly being, nor is it possible to know when or how this deliverance will happen. The important thing is that God will deliver them” (*Isaiah 1–39*, 362). However, he fails to recognize the allusion to Exodus, where the concept of a savior is revealed.

²⁹David Stacey sees a parallel between Isaiah 19:21 and Exodus 7:5, where God made himself known to Pharaoh in the plagues, and thus concludes that “make himself known” is in relation to worship and service (*Isaiah 1–39*, 124).

appears to demonstrate that the Egyptians will worship God (cf. Exod 3:12; 4:23).³⁰

The next word, זבח “sacrifice,” is a word used repeatedly in Exodus (Isa 19:21; cf. Exod 3:18; 5:3, 8). While זבח is not found together with מנחה “offering” in the Pentateuch, they are used together six times in other places in the Hebrew Bible (1 Sam 3:14; Isa 19:21; Jer 17:26; Amos 5:25; Ps 40:7; Dan 9:27). In Ps 40:6 [Eng. v. 7], the context suggests that God is not looking for sacrifice and offerings but rather for the will and heart of the people to be submitted to God. Trust and faithfulness are more pleasant in God’s sight. A similar thought is also expressed in Isa 19:21, where the Egyptians take a vow and perform it. By contrast, the children of Israel took a vow at Mount Sinai (Exod 19:3–9; 24:3–8) but did not execute it (Exod 32). However, the word נדר, used in Isa 19:21, does not appear in Exodus, suggesting that perhaps Isaiah had another text in mind here. The words “sacrifice,” “offering,” and “vow” do appear in Lev 7:16; 22:21, where they describe peace offerings. This suggests that the vow is a specific oath that is fulfilled and completed with a sacrifice and an offering, demonstrating a type of reconciliation with God (cf. Deut 23:21–23, a vow regarding foreigners).

In Isa 19:22, the word רפא, “heal,” is an allusion found in Deuteronomy rather than in Exodus. In Deuteronomy, the song of Moses says that God “kills” and “heals” (Deut 32:39), suggesting that God is in control. The song of Moses is a reminder to the Israelites of their covenant relationship with God and a reference back to their Exodus experience. In Isaiah, the word “kill” is replaced with the word “strike,” while the word “heal” is found in both books (Deut 32:39; Isa 19:22). Although the word “heal” is not found in Exodus, the word “strike” appears in connection with God striking Egypt with plagues³¹ (cf. Exod 7:27) and with the Passover night (cf. Exod 12:23, 27).³² Isaiah’s message could be signaling that although God strikes—which in the context is not a continuous action—the Egyptians can be healed.³³ Thus the judgment in the first part of Isa 19 is to bring the Egyptians to God so that they can become a better people.

³⁰See Smith, *Isaiah 1–39*, 362 n. 230.

³¹Herbert Wolf is also correct to see v. 22 as a reversal of the Exodus period and not only a reference to Deuteronomy, as I have suggested. However, when it comes to the words in Isa 19:22, there is a stronger tie to the book of Deuteronomy; thus, the link between v. 22 and the book of Exodus would be more of an echo than an allusion. See Wolf, *Interpreting Isaiah*, 125.

³²Joseph Blenkinsopp sees the words “strike” and “healing” as only an echo of Exodus and suggests that no one knows what Isaiah meant by this saying (*Isaiah 1–39*, 319). However, if Isaiah does have Exodus in mind, then this “blow” and “healing” need to be understood in light of Exod 12. John Goldingay clearly sees an allusion in “strike” and “heal” to Exodus: “Yahweh will strike as Egypt and Israel were stricken, but Yahweh will also heal Egypt as Israel was healed and Egypt was not (Exod 15:26). Egypt will turn to Yahweh as Moses did (Exod 5:22; NIV ‘return’) and make pleas to Yahweh as Egypt and Israel did then (Exod 8:28–30; NIV ‘pray’), but this time Egypt will do this for itself and find healing” (*Isaiah*, 120).

³³Perhaps a clearer translation would read, “I will not strike Egypt beyond recovery.” See Bruce K. Waltke and Michael O’Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 591.

Furthermore, Isa 19:19–25 also reveals that even when God passes judgment on people, he has not forgotten his relational covenant.

The last allusion to the Exodus we find in Isa 19:19–25 is in v. 25: ברוך עמי מצרים, “blessed be my people, Egypt,” where Egypt is called “my people.” This expression is normally applied to Israel (cf. Exod 3:7, 10; 5:1; 7:4; Deut 7:6; 1 Pet 2:9).³⁴ Isaiah 19:25 is the only verse where “my people” refers to Egypt. Furthermore, two other nations are being blessed along with Egypt: Assyria and Israel;³⁵ therefore, one can conclude that Egypt and Assyria can also be redeemed by God because he is their God.³⁶ God blesses Egypt as a representative of the people of the world.³⁷

Isaiah 19:19–25 Adapts Exodus 3

It appears that Isa 19:19–25 employs many allusions to the Exodus for several reasons. There are important concepts in the Exodus narrative that help to illuminate the conditions of Isaiah’s time. Exodus consistently reveals that God is sovereign,³⁸ which entails God’s involvement both in history (cf. Exod 2:23–25; 3:6) and in the present (cf. Exod 3:7–10).³⁹ The Exodus narrative also demonstrates that God has both a judgment and a covenant relationship with humanity. While Exodus contains a strong concept of judgment on Egypt through plagues,⁴⁰ the idea of a universal plan of salvation also appears in Exodus.⁴¹

³⁴Hosea negates it when he calls Israel “not my people” (Hos 1:9, 10; 2:23; cf. Rom 9:25, 26).

³⁵In Isaiah 52:4, both Egypt and Assyria are mentioned in connection to “my people” Israel, Egypt as Israel’s place of exile and Assyria as Israel’s oppressor. However, besides mentioning Egypt and Assyria, this verse does not assist in interpreting Isa 19:25.

³⁶See Kaiser, *Isaiah 13–39*, 111.

³⁷In Isa 19, Isaiah expands on the promise of God to Abraham in Gen 12:1–3 that all the families of the earth shall be blessed through his descendants (cf. Gen 28:14). God sees Abraham’s descendants as spreading throughout the world and taking the gospel to all people. A fulfillment of this promise takes place in the book of Exodus when God delivers the Israelites from slavery along with Egyptians who choose to join them (Exod 12:38). See Young, *Isaiah Volume 2*, 45.

³⁸For more information, see Carl F. Keil and Franz Delitzsch, *The Pentateuch* (BCOT I; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952), 441–43.

³⁹Douglas K. Stuart gives interesting details on the history and present aspects of God (*Exodus* [NAC 2; Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2006], 115 n. 28). Umberto Cassuto refers to Exod 3:14–15, where the name of YHWH is used to reveal past, present, or future (*A Commentary on the Book of Exodus* [Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1967], 37–38).

⁴⁰One may ask if the judgment in Exodus was against the nation of Egypt or Pharaoh or the gods of Egypt. At first glance it appears that God rejected the people of Egypt. However, while Egypt received a severe blow by God’s judgment, it was also used by God’s people as a place of refuge (cf. 2 Kgs 25:26; Matt 2:13–14). The Bible tells us that the judgment of God is against “all the gods of Egypt” (Exod 12:12; cf. 18:11; Num 33:4). However, since Pharaoh was also perceived as a god of Egypt, the judgment might also be directed to Pharaoh, because the conflict was primarily between God and Pharaoh (Exod 5:1–5). See Waldemar Janzen, *Exodus* (Waterloo, Ont.: Herald Press, 2000), 158. In Isa 19 there is an oracle of judgment against Egypt, and again we can see that the judgment is directed against “the idols of Egypt” (v. 1); however, the judgment is also against the people of Egypt since they are the ones who worship the idols. Thus, both Exodus and Isaiah show that while the

This covenant view is revealed both in how God goes about freeing Israel from Egypt and in how God reaches out to the Egyptians. For example, some Egyptians went out of Egypt with the Israelites (Exod 12:38). Furthermore, Pharaoh instructed Moses and Aaron to “go, serve the LORD as you have said. . . . And

judgment is not solely on the people, it includes the people of Egypt; yet they have the freedom of choice to accept or reject God.

⁴¹A question that is often asked is whether the universal plan of salvation is mainly a concept developed by the OT prophets, or whether this concept is found much earlier in the Bible. In short, the universal plan of salvation does appear before the exilic time. It is revealed when Rahab accepts the God of Israel and joins the Israelites, suggesting that foreigners may become part of Israel and therefore participate in the covenant (Josh 2; 6:24). In the same book, the Gibeonites are spared and protected by the Israelites and supply wood and water for the congregation (Josh 9). Ruth, being a foreigner, also becomes one of the elect of God (Ruth 1–4). Thus, the notion of a universal plan of salvation was in place before the time of the prophets. See Balogh, *Stele of YHWH in Egypt*, 286–90.

Exodus continues the ideas that were shaped in Genesis but now expands on them and focuses more on one group of people; however, that does not mean that the universal concepts first stated in Genesis (cf. Gen 3:15; 6–8; 12:1–3; 15; 17; 41:57) are now left out of Exodus. The author of Exodus gives particular details that demonstrate an inclusive salvation for both the Israelites and the foreigners. First, the Hebrew midwives (Exod 1) who save Hebrew boys are paralleled with the Egyptian princess (Exod 2), who also acts as a deliverer for a Hebrew boy. The Egyptian princess is a foreigner but is also an instrument of God’s salvation to Israel. Moreover, “the actions of this non-Israelite are presented in direct parallel to those of the God of Israel: she ‘comes down,’ ‘sees’ the child, ‘hears’ its cry, takes pity on him, draws him out of the water, and provides for his daily needs (cf. 3:7–8). What she does for Moses, God is soon to do for Israel” (Danna N. Fewell and David M. Gunn, *Gender, Power, and Promise: The Subject of the Bible’s First Story* [Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993], 93). Cf. Richard M. Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh: Sexuality in the Old Testament* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2007), 237. Moses is portrayed in the narrative as both an Israelite and an Egyptian (Exod 2:6, 19). He will be acting as a deliverer for Israel later on in the narrative and is also shown to be a deliverer for foreign women at the well (Exod 2:19).

The hardening of Pharaoh’s heart demonstrates God’s working in the life of a man who is resisting God’s salvific plan; otherwise it would not have been such a struggle (Exod 7–12). The plagues poured on Egypt accomplish two things: first, they convict the Israelites of who God is, and, second, the Egyptians are likewise convicted. The difference is that the Israelites accept God as their deliverer, while some Egyptians reject God. I say “some Egyptians” because there are some Egyptians who accept the true God (see Exod 9:20). This is demonstrated by the number of Egyptians who go out of Egypt with the Israelites (Exod 12:38). Finally, the blood of the lamb placed on the doorposts on the night of the Passover is not just for the Israelites; it can be assumed that some Egyptians also participate in this ritual (cf. Exod 12:43–49; Num 15:14–16).

See studies on גר “alien” in the Pentateuch by Jacob Zallel Lauterbach, *Studies in Jewish Law, Custom and Folklore* (New York: KTAV Publishing House, 1970), 159–206; Jacob Milgrom, *Numbers: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation* (JPSTC 4; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1990), 398–402; Jiří Moskala, *The Laws of Clean & Unclean Animals in Leviticus 11: Their Nature, Theology, & Rationale* (ATSDS; Berrien Springs, Mich.: Adventist Theological Society Publications, 2000), 272–76; Christiana van Houten, *The Alien in Israelite Law* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991).

bless me also" (Exod 12:31–32).⁴² For a short time, even Pharaoh's mind was altered.⁴³

Implications for the Meaning of Isaiah 19:19–25

The covenant theme is important in the book of Exodus. The words *sacrifice, altar, strike, sign, or serve/worship*⁴⁴ occur in the first twelve chapters of Exodus and are also found in the context of the covenant-ratification ceremonies described in Exod 19–24, which outline the salvific plan for saving humanity.⁴⁵ Because of what God does for the people and their response, they are ultimately called "my people" (cf. Rev 18:4).⁴⁶ "My" is an indication of a special relationship of love.⁴⁷ These concepts are what Isaiah selects for inclusion in ch. 19, this time not for the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but for the Egyptians. This demonstrates that God's salvific plan includes the Egyptian nation.

Isaiah may also employ the Exodus allusions to warn Judah that, even though they are chosen as God's people, they are not indispensable to achieve God's purpose. There are other people with whom God can work. Furthermore, while Judah wants to make an alliance with Egypt (cf. 2 Kgs 18:17–25), Isaiah demonstrates that Egypt is also an object of divine judgment (cf. Isa 19:1–15).⁴⁸

⁴²See Keil and Delitzsch, *The Pentateuch*, 25; Laurent Monsengwo-Pasinya, "Isaïe xix 16–25 et universalisme dans la LXX," in *Congress Volume: Salamanca, 1983* (ed. John A. Emerton; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1985), 197.

⁴³See Stuart, *Exodus*, 294.

⁴⁴While these words are related to the covenant theme, it is important to note that their use is not limited to this theme alone.

⁴⁵For information on how Exod 3 is interrelated with Exod 19–24, see John I. Durham, *Exodus* (WBC 3; Waco: Word, 1987), 29–30.

Exodus 19–24 outlines a plan for saving humanity: First, God saves the Israelites from the hands of Egypt. For this reason, God gives the Ten Commandments to specify how the Israelites should behave, both in relation to God (the first four commandments) and toward others (the last six commandments). Exodus 20:2 demonstrates that God delivers first and then asks Israel to follow the commandments, which are the covenant. This shows that God's covenant with Israel was not the first one, and it would not be the last one (for example, the covenant with David; cf. 2 Sam 7). Exodus 19–24 reveals how the covenant works, thus demonstrating how God saves people. Worshipping/serving reveals, on the part of the worshippers, that God is the true god, whose place no other gods will be taking. This also acknowledges that God is worthy to be worshipped because he gave them life by saving them from Egypt. The altar in Exod 20:24–26 reveals where the sacrifices were taking place, showing what God would do by giving Jesus for the remission of sin (cf. Heb 10). The "sign" reveals the covenant made between God and humanity, that God will uphold God's part of the bargain in saving people.

⁴⁶See Larry L. Lichtenwalter, "Exodus and Apocalypse: Deliverance Then and Now," in *Christ, Salvation, and the Eschaton: Essays in Honor of Hans K. LaRondelle* (ed. Daniel Heinz, Jiří Moskala, and Peter M. van Bemmelen; Berrien Springs, Mich.: Old Testament Department, Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, Andrews University, 2009), 403–4. For further information, see also Aschalew Kebede, "How Can the Concepts of Universalism and Nationalism in the Book of Isaiah be Reconciled?" (Ph.D. diss., New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 2002), 84.

⁴⁷Cassuto, *Book of Exodus*, 34.

⁴⁸See Motyer, *Prophecy of Isaiah*, 166.

Yet those who receive divine wrath are also recipients of God's grace. God uses Egypt as a mirror of how Judah has acted. While this mirror is employed as an object lesson for Judah, it also reveals the covenantal work of God.

There are some differences between Exodus and Isaiah. The first and greatest difference is in the way the covenant is directed. In Exodus, the covenant was first and foremost with Israel (cf. Exod 7:4), the elect people. In Isaiah, the covenant is dispersed to more than one nation.⁴⁹ Second, in Exodus, God's sovereignty is revealed to Israel first (Exod 3:14, 15; 4:1–9, 27–31) and then to the Egyptians (cf. Exod 3:20; 7:1–12:36). In Isa 19, God's sovereignty is disclosed to the Egyptians first in the form of judgment (Isa 19:1–16; esp. vv. 1, 3), but more specifically the judgment "is presented in the form of a YHWH theophany (v. 1),"⁵⁰ with the result that the Israelites will remember God and how God works with judgment and grace (cf. Exod 2:24).⁵¹ By using reversal, Isaiah places the emphasis on Egypt instead of Israel.

Third, the Israelites in Exodus did not build an altar or pillar in Egypt, nor did they worship there, but were asked to go to a better land to worship (cf. Exod 3:8; 5:1–5). However, in Isaiah, the Egyptians build an altar and a pillar as a sign of worshipping the Lord (cf. Isa 19:19–20). The altar being built in Egypt instead of in the Promised Land may suggest that the Egyptians may not have been fully under the covenant of Abraham in the sense that, for the Egyptians, perhaps their land was considered to be *like* the Promised Land, while the Israelites were given *the Promised Land*. These differences do not weaken the relationship between these two books, but rather reveal the intention of Isaiah in using Exodus concepts of covenant and applying them to a nation other than Israel.

Conclusion

Isaiah takes the scenario and narrative principles that are found in Exodus and applies them to Egypt rather than to God's chosen people, Israel. Isaiah employs

⁴⁹David J. A. Clines sees the covenant in Gen 12:1–3 as being only between God and Abraham (*The Theme of the Pentateuch* [2d ed.; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997], 30). However, I believe that the covenant found in Exodus is not limited to what is often called the "covenant heirs," but it includes a relationship between God and the elect. William W. Klein says it best: "God's love alone stands as the motive for his choice of the people of Israel to be his own. Never do the biblical writers describe election as a reward. It does not come in response to any attribute or action of Israel. His election did not give Israel a privileged position among the nations so she might gloat. Rather, God chose Israel to serve him and reflect his character and ways to other nations—'that they may proclaim [His] praise' (Isa 43:21). In this sense God's election of Israel parallels his election of individuals—he has called her into existence to serve him in the world. Thus Israel's election does not mean God has rejected the other nations. Rather, election creates for Israel the task of representing God among the nations so salvation might come to them" (*The New Chosen People: A Corporate View of Election* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan 1990], 43). Cf. John H. Walton, *Covenant, God's Purpose, God's Plan* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 26.

⁵⁰Balogh, *Stele of YHWH in Egypt*, 269–70.

⁵¹According to Joseph Blenkinsopp, in Exod 2:25, "the LORD also made himself known to them" refers to the Egyptians. He further states that this "opens up the prospect of significant numbers of Egyptians attaching themselves to the Yahveh cult" (*Isaiah 1–39*, 319).

allusions with certain key words that lead the reader to see the associated story of Exodus. However, instead of Israel being the subject of a long narrative account, we have here a concise prophecy, but this time with Egypt as the subject. Thus, Isaiah takes the Exodus concept of a covenant between God and Israel and turns it on its head for a bigger picture: a covenant with another nation.

Isaiah can refer to both Egypt and Assyria as recipients of covenant blessing (19:25) because the elective covenant with Abraham and his descendants was to be a channel of blessing to all nations (Gen 12:3; 22:18). The Abrahamic covenant always had a universal purpose that was to be more fully actualized in the future. This points in the direction of a universalism that is more fully developed throughout the book of Isaiah (cf. Isa 2; 11; 25:6–9; 42:1–9; 44:1–5; 45:6, 14–17; 60:1–3). While God still uses Israel, God is not dependent on Israel to fulfill the divine covenant with other nations.



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