

“What it means to be Reformed”; Session # 26 – Sola Gratia – “The Lord Striking and Healing a Nation”, prepared for the Adult Sunday School class on February 8th, 2015, by Pastor Paul Rendall.

Read Isaiah 19: 18-25 -

Verse 18 - “In that day five cities in the land of Egypt will speak the language of Canaan and swear by the Lord of hosts; one will be called the City of Destruction.

19 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.

20 And it will be for a sign and for a witness to the Lord of hosts in the land of Egypt; for they will cry to the Lord because of the oppressors, and He will send them a Savior and a Mighty One, and He will deliver them.

21 Then the Lord will be known to Egypt, and the Egyptians will know the Lord in that day, and will make sacrifice and offering; yes, they will make a vow to the Lord and perform it.

22 And the Lord will strike Egypt, He will strike and heal it; they will return to the Lord, and He will be entreated by them and heal them.

23 In that day there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria, and the Assyrian will come into Egypt and the Egyptian into Assyria, and the Egyptians will serve with the Assyrians.

24 In that day Israel will be one of three with Egypt and Assyria—a blessing in the midst of the land,

25 whom the Lord of hosts shall bless, saying, “Blessed is Egypt My people, and Assyria the work of My hands, and Israel My inheritance.”

Over the past few Sundays, I have been trying to link together the Doctrine of Election with the fulfillment of prophecy. I believe that this is important for all who are Reformed, because it was from the writings of the Reformers and the Puritans that I personally came to understand the doctrine of Election in a greater and better way. It is true that God saves His Elect one at a time. But this does not preclude His being able to save many people, and even nations, at more certain and specific times. This God has done this in the Great Revivals of past generations, but the promises of the major and minor prophets, as well as the plain reading of Romans 11: 1-29, indicate that there will be a time in the future when God will pour out His Spirit in a greater way than He ever has before. I believe that every Christian ought to have a great expectation for what the Bible says is yet to come in the history of the Church before Christ’s Second Coming.

Here in this passage of Scripture (Isaiah 19: 18-25) we see God promising to do something very mighty; that at a particular point in the history of this present, evil Church age, during the latter time period of that age, which is called by many, the Millennium, which will come before Christ’s Second Coming, that God will strike Egypt and He will heal it spiritually. This will come to pass according to His eternal purposes in Electing love. Sometimes when the word “strike” is used in the Bible, it is used in reference to God’s doing a work of judgment on a person or a nation. Psalm 110, verse 5 says: “The Lord is at Thy right hand shall strike through kings in the day of His wrath.” (King James Version) But here we see God’s sovereign and merciful purpose in election, to save a sinful unworthy nation – Egypt. It says in verse 18 – “In that day five cities in the land of Egypt will speak the language of Canaan and swear by the Lord of hosts.” One of those cities would be called, “The City of Destruction”. That is, in that particular city the sinners there were so wicked that it was thought that they could not be saved. But we need to believe that God’s grace is stronger than the stoutest heart. This is a Reformed truth and a Biblical truth. It is promised here that He will save these many people in Egypt by striking them in a spiritual way, and healing the majority of the nation of their sin sickness. In other words, many people, a majority of

the nation will be struck by the Holy Spirit's great and powerful presence and working. This "striking" will convict them of their sins; and then the Holy Spirit shall apply the healing balm of Gilead to their souls – The regenerating grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. The result will be that they will return to the Lord, and He will be entreated by them, and heal them. And He will not only heal the nation of Egypt, but He will also heal Assyria, the nation that was traditionally the great enemy of Israel. So these 3 nations the Lord's shall save in this same general time period; that which is called the Millennium. Together, they shall serve the Lord in that day. Brethren, the Church of Jesus Christ, ourselves included, have much to pray for, and to look forward to, during this upcoming time of the Millennium and should be much in prayer for it.

The Savoy Confession of 1658 says this in its 26th Chapter, Paragraph 5 –

“As the Lord in his care and love towards his Church, hath in his infinite wise providence exercised it with great variety in all ages, for the good of them that love him, and his own glory; so according to his promise, we expect that in the latter days, antichrist being destroyed, the Jews called, and the adversaries of the kingdom of his dear Son broken, the churches of Christ being enlarged, and edified through a free and plentiful communication of light and grace, shall enjoy in this world a more quiet, peaceable and glorious condition than they have enjoyed.”

In the text in Isaiah 19, it says that when struck with grace that the Egyptians come to know the Lord, and they would speak the language of Canaan; that is, that they would be able to speak about having come to saving faith in Christ, and to understand the truth and doctrines of the Bible so that they can hold them fast and speak about them to others. They will know how to speak about grace and how to preach Christ from every major doctrine of the Bible.

Robert Hawker in his commentary at this verse says: “I beseech the Reader to remark every word in these verses. Let him observe how the sweet promises contained in them open. In that day, namely, the gospel day; the day of Christ, which Abraham, ages back, but now so much nearer, saw afar off; rejoiced and was glad. And how blessed is the promise to Egypt in this day. Egypt, had been miserably spoken of before, but now in mercies. So is it in all the transitions from nature to grace. The language of Canaan is the language of the gospel; so that Egypt, shall partake with Israel in the mercies of redemption, and shall speak the same language. And observe, that this is to be not in one or two instances, but by towns and cities; yea, five at once, as if to intimate that day of gospel grace, when the Holy Ghost shall be poured out upon all flesh, agreeably to the promise, Joel 2: 28-32; Acts 2:17-21. Neither is this all: for an altar to the Lord shall be set up in Egypt. Christ is the New Testament Altar, and the Egyptians, like Israel, shall present all their offerings upon Him, and in Him, and by Him: neither doth the blessing of gospel grace stop here; for when the poor sinner, under convictions of sin, and the oppressions of the enemy, is constrained to cry out unto the Lord, the Lord will send a Saviour, and a great one, and he will deliver him from all his burden, and from all his sins. Pray, Reader, pause over this precious scripture, for it is indeed most precious; and say, to whom but to Jesus the almighty Saviour of lost sinners, can this refer? Indeed was not his name called Jesus by the angel, for this express reason, because he should save his people from their sins?” Matthew 1:21.

John Howe in his 5th Sermon on “The Prosperous State of the Christian Interest before the end of time” - And both these effects, numerous conversions, and the high improvements of converts, are so connatural, so congenerous, do so very well agree with one another, that we may very well suppose them to go together, that the former will be accompanied with the latter. For this great effusion of the Spirit we must understand to be sanative, intended for

the healing of a diseased world, and to repair the corrupted forlorn state of things ; and therefore must be proportionable to the state of the case, in reference whereto it is to be a means of cure. It is very apparent, that wickedness, as it is the more diffusive, is always the more malignant. The diffusion and the malignity are wont to accompany one another ; just as it is with diseases, the plague and other distempers that are noisome and dangerous ; they are always more mortal as they are more contagious and spreading ; and so are extensively and intensively worse at the same time. And it must be proportionably so in the means of cure ; there must then be such a pouring forth of the Spirit, that will answer the exigency of the case in both respects, that there be very numerous conversions, and a great improvement of converts unto higher and more excellent pitches of religion, than have been usually known in former times.”

Commenting on Isaiah 19: 21, Joseph Benson says in his commentary – “But though this prophecy concerning Egypt might have its first accomplishment in the deliverance of the Egyptians from the Persian yoke by Alexander the Great, and in that knowledge of the true God, and of his revealed will, which many of the Egyptians received under the government of the Ptolemies, through their intercourse with the Jews, and the translation of the Jewish Scriptures into the Greek language; yet, doubtless, this prediction has a further and higher aspect, as commentators in general have understood it, and refers to that spiritual redemption and salvation which the Egyptians, among many other ignorant and idolatrous Gentiles, were to receive, and actually did receive, by the coming of Christ, the great and only Saviour of lost mankind, and by the publication of his gospel to them. This appears still more evidently from the verses which follow. But the full and final accomplishment of this, as well as of many other important prophecies, shall not take place till Mohammedanism and idolatry shall be completely overthrown, and the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.”

Joseph Sutcliffe says in his commentary on Isaiah 19: 21 – “Isaiah saw that Egypt would be a sanctuary for the Jews who should escape the sword of the Chaldees: and at one time the number of the refugees was so great that “five cities did literally speak the language of Canaan.” Alexander the great was a savior to them, and the Ptolemies were their patrons. God blesses the nation that receives his exiled people. This prophecy may however have a reference to the future conversion of Egypt to the Christian faith.”

Charles Spurgeon says on Isaiah 19: 21 – “This is a very remarkable prophecy. Attempts have been made to explain it, as if it were already fulfilled. I believe all such attempts to be utter failures. This promise stands on record, to be fulfilled at some future day. In those bright days for which some of us are looking, when the knowledge of the Lord shall cover the earth, so the waters cover the sea, then shall this word to Egypt be verified; yea, and God shall be glorified both by Egypt and Assyria, as well as in the land of Israel. This ought to be an encouragement to carry on missionary operations with great vigor. Here is a distinct promise for Assyria and for Egypt. Let not the missionary be afraid, even if for thousands of years to come there should be little apparent success to the preaching of the gospel. If the Lord should tarry another six thousand years, ay, sixty thousand years—and he may—we are still to go on working, and still to go on laboring, looking for his coming, and expecting it, but not relaxing our efforts because he pleases to delay it, for the Lord has sworn that all flesh shall know his glory, and you may depend upon it, there is no spot of earth that shall be left to be Satan’s dominion. It shall be conquered for Christ, and in truth he shall “see of the travail of his soul, and he shall be satisfied.”

Do we have any examples in the Bible of God’s striking and healing on the individual level? Yes, I think that we do. 2nd Kings 5, verses 1-15; especially verses 7, 11, and 14. The disease of leprosy was a picture sin here. The king of Syria first sent Naaman with a letter to the king of

Israel requesting that he might recover him of his leprosy. The king of Israel read the letter and then he rends his clothes and says, "Am I God to kill and to make alive?" This shows that God can smite and kill, and that he can also smite and make alive if he wants to. When Elisha called for Naaman to come to him, he came to him thinking that the prophet Elisha would surely come out to him and stand, and call on the name of the Lord his God, and "strike" his hand over the place and recover the leper. Instead God would strike with healing through His word to Naaman that he should go down and dip himself seven times in the river Jordan. When Naaman believed the word of the Lord, and went and washed, he was completely cured of his leprosy.

In the New Testament we have the example of the persecutor Saul being struck down with blinding light on the road to Damascus, but in that striking Saul was healed, and he went on to become the Apostle Paul.

Do we have any other examples of God's striking and healing on a group level? Yes we do. It is found in 2nd Kings Chapter 6, verses 8-23. Soldiers had been sent from the king of Syria to capture Elijah because he knew the words that the king spoke in his own bedchamber and thus many of the Syrian king's battle plans were being thwarted. But when the soldiers came to take Elisha, he prayed and said unto the Lord, "Smite this people I pray thee, with blindness." "And he smote them with blindness according to the word of Elisha. He captured them and brought them into the land of Samaria, and then said to the Lord, "Open the eyes of these men, that they may see." And the Lord opened their eyes, and they saw; and behold they were in the midst of Samaria." "And the king of Israel said unto Elisha, when he saw them, 'My father, shall I smite them' "Shall I smite them?" "And he answered, 'You shall not smite them: would you smite those whom you have taken captive with your sword and with your bow?' "Set bread and water before them, that they may eat and drink, and go to their master."..... "So the bands of Syria came no more into the land of Israel."

Rev. John Howe speaking on Ezekiel 39: 29 – "The Prosperous State of the Christian Interest, before the end of time, by a plentiful effusion of the Holy Spirit; considered in Fifteen Sermons." (1678)

"That such scriptures have been fulfilling ever since the first dawnings of Christianity, there is no doubt; but the magnificence of the expressions of many of these prophecies, seem yet to be very far from being answered by correspondent effects. **The passage in Joel 2. 28.** where it is said, that "the Spirit shall be poured forth upon all flesh," we are told, it is true, in Acts 2. 16. that it had its accomplishment : "This is that which was spoken by the prophet," saith Peter, when the people began to wonder at what they saw, upon that strange pouring forth of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost. But it is plain, that he did not intend, that the completion of that prophecy was confined to that point of time. For afterwards, in verse 37, he tells them that were now awakened, and cried, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?"; that they must "repent and be baptized, and they should receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." For, saith he, "the promise" (that promise most apparently, that he had reference to before,) "is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call." So that all that was intended in that prophecy is not fulfilled, till God hath done calling. And many other scriptures seem to intimate, that there shall be a time of far more general calling, than hath been hitherto; when the receiving and gathering in "of the Jews shall be as life from the dead," as a resurrection from the dead, Rom. 11. 15. And when the fullness of the Gentiles shall come in, ver. 25. The way of speaking implies, that that fullness or plenitude was yet behind, to succeed after the apostle's time ; and no such time hath succeeded yet."

