

Civil war in Egypt, the Nile River and the prophet Isaiah?

Dr Michael Jarvis

In large measure the survival of Egypt depends on the River Nile. Its waters enable agricultural production in an arid region and supplies abundant fish and drinking water for the population.



Calculations of river water flow show that by far the greatest contribution to the Nile comes from the Ethiopian Blue Nile. **If the Blue Nile flow were to be stopped then the Nile would dry up from its mouth.** This is because water loss from evaporation along the length of the Nile is greater than the flow of water from Lake Victoria.

To regulate the flow of Nile water to Egypt the Egyptians completed the Aswan High Dam in 1971. This was designed to reduce flood damage lower down the river but also to enable irrigation projects and generation

of electricity. In addition this and other dams were built within Egyptian territory to serve as defences against possible years of abnormally low rainfall in the Blue Nile catchment areas of Ethiopia. In a real sense these could be called **'dams of defence'**.

Taming the Nile

Construction of Ethiopia's dam has led to threats of war, but it could actually benefit Egypt by cutting water loss from Lake Nasser



In recent years tensions have arisen between Egypt and Ethiopia because the Ethiopians are busy constructing a massive dam on the Blue Nile that supplies most of the River Nile water. The balance comes from the White Nile originating in Lake Victoria in Uganda. The Ugandan source is already controlled by a dam built at Jinja.

Ethiopia is building this enormous dam on the Blue Nile, both for irrigation projects and generation of electricity. Egypt realises that theoretically the Blue Nile flow could be stopped for up to a year and this scenario could not be tolerated by Egypt. In fact the Egyptians have said that any interference with the water supply reaching Egypt would mean war. After many meetings a compromise seems to have been reached.

An article in New Scientist Journal of 28 May 2015 by Fred Pearce is headed:

Win-win deal helps avoid war over Ethiopia's \$5 billion Nile dam

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The article reads: CRISIS averted? Scientists may be on the verge of resolving a potentially war-triggering water dispute: how to share out the flow of the River Nile. A decades-long row over one of the world's longest rivers pits downstream Egypt, whose agriculture depends on the [river's flow](#), against upstream Ethiopia, which is building [Africa's biggest hydroelectric dam](#).

There have been threats of war over the \$5-billion dam, but researchers hope they have come up with the bones of a win-win deal that gives more water and electricity to both countries. They are now pressing for its inclusion in a final deal on the dam to be signed next year.

Ethiopia began construction of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam in a gorge of the Blue Nile, the Nile's biggest tributary, **in 2011 and expects to have it up and running in 2017**. The dam will be able to hold back the entire flow of the Blue Nile for more than a year, potentially cutting evaporation annually from its surface – a quarter of the Nile's average flow and up to 40 per cent in a dry year.

But on 23 March, the three governments announced a surprise preliminary agreement to share the water. Behind the move was an [optimistic assessment](#) by international hydrologists and engineers, which has now been made public.

The solution involves reducing the losses to evaporation from Lake Nasser, the reservoir behind Egypt's Aswan High Dam in the Nubian desert. Up to 16 cubic kilometres of water supplies to Egypt and Sudan (see map).

Storing more of that water in the reservoir behind Ethiopia's dam could cut those losses, as it is deeper, has a surface area less than a third as great and sits in the cool and wet highlands. But it would also cut Egypt's electricity generation, so Ethiopia would need to share electricity from its new dam, says [Kenneth Strzepek](#) at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Does this all have significance relating to the Bible prophet Isaiah?

In the Bible book of Isaiah chapter 19 there is a prophecy about Egypt, a **civil war** and the **drying up of the River Nile**.

Civil war: We read (NIV translation):

“I will stir up Egyptian against Egyptian - brother will fight against brother, neighbour against neighbour, city against city, kingdom against kingdom. The Egyptians will lose heart, and I will bring their plans to nothing; they will consult the idols and the spirits of the dead, the mediums and the spiritists.

I will hand the Egyptians over to the power of a cruel master, and a fierce king will rule over them”, declares the Lord Almighty.

We certainly are witnessing the rapid escalation of a civil war in Egypt as shown in the two following articles:

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BBC report on 12 July 2015

Egypt 'at war' after Cairo bomb attack says PM. The Egyptian Prime Minister, Ibrahim Mahlab, has described his country as being "at war", after a bomb attack in Cairo on the Italian consulate. One person was killed and 10 injured in the blast.

Islamic State militants have said they were behind the explosion.

Egypt President Sisi warns of 'long battle' with militants

- 31 January 2015
- From the section [Middle East](#)

Funerals have been taking place for those killed in the Sinai attacks

Egypt faces a long and difficult battle with militants, the country's president has said, in his first remarks since a deadly attack in the Sinai region.

Abdul Fatah al-Sisi spoke a day after a group linked to Islamic State said it killed at least 32 soldiers and police.

"This battle will be difficult, strong, evil and will take a long time," he said in comments broadcast on state TV.

Mr Sisi cut short a visit to an African Union summit to return to Egypt in the wake of the Sinai attack.

On Saturday morning he chaired a meeting of the country's Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (Scaf).

Reports say he ended the meeting by issuing a presidential decree to form a new military command for Sinai with the aim of tackling the growing militant threat.

Drying up of the River Nile

For the first time in human history it will be possible to dry up the River Nile, once the Ethiopian Dam is finished in 2017.

Right now it may seem inconceivable that the Ethiopians would turn off the Blue Nile water because this would mean war with Egypt. However, if a protracted civil war in Egypt made it impossible for the Egyptians to threaten Ethiopia we could imagine scenarios where the river flow could be cut off. The dam has enough capacity to turn off the blue Nile for at least a year.

If this theoretical scenario ever materialises then the Nile could dry up from its mouth. Initially, Egyptians could use water stored in their dams (brooks of defence) but this would soon be used up by human consumption and the very high evaporation rate existing in that hot climate.

This speculation is interesting from a Bible perspective because the Isaiah prophecy goes on to describe just such a scenario. We read:

*The waters of the river will dry up, and the riverbed will be parched and dry.
The canals will stink, the streams of Egypt will dwindle and dry up.
The reeds and rushes will wither, also the plants along the Nile, at the mouth of the river.
Every sown field along the Nile will become parched, will blow away and be no more.
The fishermen will groan and lament, and all who cast hooks into the Nile... (verses 5-8)*

The King James Bible Translation and some of the Hebrew words used, bring out even more significant details:

*And the waters shall fail from the sea, and the river shall be wasted and dried up.
And they shall **turn the rivers far away**; and the **brooks of defence** shall be emptied and dried up. (verses 5-6)*

The Hebrew word translated as 'turn' is 'Zanach'. It can mean 'To cast off far away'.

We may well ask if there could be a better description of the waters being turned off by human action closing the Ethiopian dam on the Blue Nile?

The words '**they shall turn**' indicates human action rather than some climatic factor such as a severe drought in Ethiopia.

Reference to '**brooks of defence**' may refer to the Aswan and other dams built within Egyptian territory. These dams were built to regulate river water flow .

Five cities speak the language of Canaan

Isaiah's prophecy also mentions that:

*In that day **five cities in Egypt** will speak the **language of Canaan** and swear allegiance to the Lord Almighty.
In that day there will be an altar to the Lord in the heart of Egypt, and a monument to the Lord at its border. It will be a sign and witness to the Lord Almighty in the land of Egypt.
When they cry out to the Lord because of their oppressors, he will send them a saviour and defender, and he will rescue them.
So the Lord will make himself known to the Egyptians, and in that day they will acknowledge the Lord. (verses 18-21).*

The reference to 'speaking the language of Canaan' may, according to the NIV Study Bible, possibly be a symbolic reference to Egypt's allegiance to the Lord'. Certainly any Egyptian who is a Christian will accept that the Bible is speaking to us about the God of Israel and the land of Canaan.

It is significant that although Egypt is predominantly Islamic, between 6 and 10 % of the population are Orthodox Christians. Furthermore, as shown on the previous map, most Christians are located at present in 5 or 6 main regions along the Nile River.

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Historically the Christian communities have supported which ever Egyptian ruler allowed them the greatest safety. Right now they see their greatest threat coming from fundamentalist Islam and especially from ISIS and the Muslim Brotherhood. As a result most will support the present Army led government in the civil war that is now rapidly escalating.



The Isaiah prophecy speaks of seven cities '*speaking the language of Canaan*'. I wonder if this refers to the cities situated in the parts of Egypt shown on the map in pink, where the majority of Egypt's Christians live.

It is also significant that previous Coptic 'popes' have discouraged Egyptian Christians from making pilgrimages to Israel. However, their recently elected pope has allowed these pilgrimages.

In recent years increasing numbers of Egyptian Coptic Christians have been making pilgrimages to Israel.

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The Times of Israel of 13 July 2015 we read:

Despite a decades-old ban by the Egyptian Coptic Church, Christians from that denomination have been flocking to Jerusalem over the past few years, especially in the period surrounding Easter.

Some 5,500 Coptic Christians have made their way to Israel for the pilgrimage this year, according to Gulf Times. That figure is a significant drop from two years ago, when it was estimated that 15,000 Copts arrived for Easter season.

Overall conclusions

This Isaiah prophecy about Egypt is a good example of the fact that many Bible prophecies are hard to understand until the predicted events start to materialise.

Probably one of the best examples of this is Isaiah chapter 53. Before the death of Jesus on the cross this passage must have seemed very strange and puzzling. However, we can now look back at the recorded details relating to the crucifixion of Jesus and marvel at how Isaiah was in fact prophesying about him.

The Bible also contains a considerable number of prophecies about what is called the 'End Times'. From these prophecies we can easily make wrong conclusions about future events that could now be close to fulfilment, but we certainly live at a stage in human history when many of these ancient prophecies seem more realistic for imminent fulfilment.

Regarding Egypt, my speculation is that the present low level civil war in Egypt will escalate rapidly into a major conflict. It is between ISIS and many of the Muslim Brotherhood adherents on the one side and the Egyptian army on the other side.

If fanatical Islam such as ISIS finally takes over Egypt then we will see fulfilment of the words *'I will hand the Egyptians over to the power of a cruel master, and a fierce king will rule over them'*. (Isaiah 4:4 NIV).

It is not so hard to visualise a time when many countries may combine their efforts to defeat the rapidly advancing extremism that is best displayed by ISIS. If in the future they are victorious in Egypt then manipulating the flow of the River Nile could become a powerful tool in the hands of those opposing the future cruel rulers of Egypt.

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15-07-2015

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