

EZEKIEL

Hard to Heart

“Egypt in Denial”

Chapters 29 - 32

More times than not, the ‘big game’ or the ‘big fight’ turns out to be a lopsided disappointment.

Something like that played out on a national level in the sixth century BC between Egypt and Babylon. Egypt kept trying to assert itself but, in the end, it was Babylon under the rule of Nebuchadnezzar that easily won the contest.

We’re in a long section of Ezekiel that declares God’s judgment against seven nations. In chapters 29 through 32 we come to a long section in that long section that deals entirely with Egypt.

Egypt would flex its national muscles but, in the end, God would use Babylon to judge her.

We’re going to take on these four chapters all at once. In the interest of time we’re going to do it by highlighting something in each chapter.

It just so happens that in each chapter there is a notable comparison:

- In chapter 29 Egypt’s judgement is compared to the capturing of a crocodile.
- In chapter 30 Egypt’s judgement is compared to the breaking of both arms.
- In chapter 31 Egypt’s judgement is compared to the felling of a great tree.

- In chapter 32 Egypt's judgement is compared to the trapping of animals.

We start in chapter twenty-nine with the crocodile.

Ezekiel 29:1 In the tenth year, in the tenth month, on the twelfth day of the month, the word of the Lord came to me, saying,

Ezekiel 29:2 "Son of man, set your face against Pharaoh king of Egypt, and prophesy against him, and against all Egypt.

Ezekiel 29:3 Speak, and say, 'Thus says the Lord God: "Behold, I am against you, O Pharaoh king of Egypt, O great monster who lies in the midst of his rivers, Who has said, 'My River is my own; I have made it for myself.'

Ezekiel 29:4 But I will put hooks in your jaws, And cause the fish of your rivers to stick to your scales; I will bring you up out of the midst of your rivers, And all the fish in your rivers will stick to your scales.

Ezekiel 29:5 I will leave you in the wilderness, You and all the fish of your rivers; You shall fall on the open field; You shall not be picked up or gathered. I have given you as food To the beasts of the field And to the birds of the heavens.

Ezekiel 29:6 "Then all the inhabitants of Egypt Shall know that I am the Lord, Because they have been a staff of reed to the house of Israel.

Ezekiel 29:7 When they took hold of you with the hand, You broke and tore all their shoulders; When they leaned on you, You broke and made all their backs quiver."

The "great monster" is probably a reference to a giant croc in the Nile River. It's a fitting image. Pharaoh thought of himself, and the nation, as a great croc ruling the Nile. God's assessment of him was that he was nothing more than a reed growing in the Nile.

The Lord would hook him and pluck him from the river with ease. The "fish... [that] stick to [his] scales" means all the satellite nations allied with Egypt would be overrun along with Egypt.

Israel had looked to Egypt for aid, to help them repel the Babylonians. God had told them through Jeremiah to not trust Egypt. He had decreed the Babylonian captivity and they were to submit to it as His discipline. Their turning to Egypt for help only made things worse.

When Nebuchadnezzar had Jerusalem surrounded Egypt dispatched an army to contest the Babylonians. The Egyptian army was defeated. Egypt was proven to be a weak help, the "reed" which when leaned upon quickly gave way.

There are things in the world we ought not to trust for help in our need. I guess the best example would be psychological therapies and treatments that have their foundation in the godless philosophies of men like Freud and Jung and Skinner and Rogers and Maslow. They are nothing more than reeds which always break when leaned upon.

I remember when I was at UCRiverside studying behavioral psychology. I asked my professor which of the major schools of psychology had the highest success rate. They were all about the same and the success rate was terrible - less than 10%. I also remember a study, a real and scientific study, that showed people were helped just as much or more by talking with friends to therapists. Reeds!

Only God can discern between the soul and the spirit and help you, heal you, make you whole.

A couple of other things to note in chapter twenty-nine:

1. In verse eight the Lord says He will “bring a sword upon” Egypt. Egyptian mythology often depicts a god putting a sword in the hand of Pharaoh. They needed to recognize that it is God who raises-up nations, giving them the sword for a time. He alone is God and Babylon would be His sword against Pharaoh.
2. In verses twelve through sixteen we’re told that Egypt would be overrun for a period of forty years but then restored, only never to her former glory. Though historical documents are scarce, Babylonian records indicate that Nebuchadnezzar subjugated Egypt taking many captives. When the Persians defeated Babylon, it was their policy to let nations co-exist. Egypt was thus restored. But history has shown that they never achieved their former glory.

In chapter 30 Egypt’s judgement is compared to the breaking of both arms.

Ezekiel 30:20 And it came to pass in the eleventh year, in the first month, on the seventh day of the month, that the word of the Lord came to me, saying,

Ezekiel 30:21 "Son of man, I have broken the arm of Pharaoh king of Egypt; and see, it has not been bandaged for healing, nor a splint put on to bind it, to make it strong enough to hold a sword.

Ezekiel 30:22 Therefore thus says the Lord God: 'Surely I am against Pharaoh king of Egypt, and will break his arms, both the strong one and the one that was broken; and I will make the sword fall out of his hand.

Ezekiel 30:23 I will scatter the Egyptians among the nations, and disperse them throughout the countries.

Ezekiel 30:24 I will strengthen the arms of the king of Babylon and put My sword in his hand; but I will break Pharaoh's arms, and he will groan before him with the groanings of a mortally wounded man.

Ezekiel 30:25 Thus I will strengthen the arms of the king of Babylon, but the arms of Pharaoh shall fall down; they shall know that I am the Lord, when I put My sword into the hand of the king of Babylon and he stretches it out against the land of Egypt.

Ezekiel 30:26 I will scatter the Egyptians among the nations and disperse them throughout the countries. Then they shall know that I am the Lord.' "

The date was April 29, 587BC, almost four months after Ezekiel's first prophecy against Egypt. The first prophecy signified the time when the forces of Egypt went out to contest Babylon. This prophecy was recorded after the Babylonians defeated Egypt.

The Pharaoh was Hophra, who ruled Egypt from 589BC to 570BC. Nebuchadnezzar broke the "arm" of Egypt so she was unable to defend Judah. Egypt's arm, symbolizing strength, was not even put in a splint so as to become strong enough to hold a sword.

A few years after Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem, he finished-off Egypt - breaking, as it were, her other arm.

The teaching, in context, is that God is in control of history. He oversees the nations, strengthening those He sees fit in order to accomplish His providence. For us, as a nation, it means we can't count on our founding or our form of government or our military might or our material prosperity or our technological superiority. In the final scheme of things, it is righteousness that exalts a nation. Righteousness right now. We must turn to God from our idols.

In chapter 31 Egypt's judgement is compared to the felling of a great tree.

Ezekiel 31:1 Now it came to pass in the eleventh year, in the third month, on the first day of the month, that the word of the Lord came to me, saying,

Ezekiel 31:2 "Son of man, say to Pharaoh king of Egypt and to his multitude: 'Whom are you like in your greatness?'

Ezekiel 31:3 Indeed Assyria was a cedar in Lebanon, With fine branches that shaded the forest, And of high stature; And its top was among the thick boughs.

Ezekiel 31:4 The waters made it grow; Underground waters gave it height, With their rivers running around the place where it was planted, And sent out rivulets to all the trees of the field.

Ezekiel 31:5 'Therefore its height was exalted above all the trees of the field; Its boughs were multiplied, And its branches became long because of the abundance of water, As it sent them out.

Ezekiel 31:6 All the birds of the heavens made their nests in its boughs; Under its branches all the beasts of the field brought forth their young; And in its shadow all great nations made their home.

Ezekiel 31:7 'Thus it was beautiful in greatness and in the length of its branches, Because its roots reached to abundant waters.

Ezekiel 31:8 The cedars in the garden of God could not hide it; The fir trees were not like its boughs, And the chestnut trees were not like its branches; No tree in the garden of God was like it in beauty.

Ezekiel 31:9 I made it beautiful with a multitude of branches, So that all the trees of Eden envied it, That were in the garden of God.'

This was June 21, 587BC, less than two months after the prophecy of chapter thirty. Ezekiel compared Egypt to Assyria while comparing Assyria to a great cedar tree.

It makes sense to compare Egypt to Assyria. Assyria had invaded Egypt and the Egyptians therefore knew her strength. In 633BC the Assyrians had attacked the capital city of Thebes. But for all their strength, God had brought Assyria to an end. The Babylonians had conquered her and they would likewise conquer Egypt.

Ezekiel then compared Assyria to a cedar in Lebanon. Several key cities of Assyria were situated at or near the Tigris River, which provided much needed water. Thus situated, Assyria grew like a cedar nourished by waters. Birds in the cedar's branches and animals under its shade speak of Assyria, like a tall tree, overshadowing and protecting all her neighbors.

The reference to “all the trees of Eden” is considered a literary exaggeration to show how grand the Assyrian Empire had become. Perfect example to show Egypt how far she, too, would fall.

Ezekiel 31:10 "Therefore thus says the Lord God: 'Because you have increased in height, and it set its top among the thick boughs, and its heart was lifted up in its height, Ezekiel 31:11 therefore I will deliver it into the hand of the mighty one of the nations, and he shall surely deal with it; I have driven it out for its wickedness.

Ezekiel 31:12 And aliens, the most terrible of the nations, have cut it down and left it; its branches have fallen on the mountains and in all the valleys; its boughs lie broken by all the rivers of the land; and all the peoples of the earth have gone from under its shadow and left it.

Ezekiel 31:13 'On its ruin will remain all the birds of the heavens, And all the beasts of the field will come to its branches -

Ezekiel 31:14 'So that no trees by the waters may ever again exalt themselves for their height, nor set their tops among the thick boughs, that no tree which drinks water may ever be high enough to reach up to them. 'For they have all been delivered to death, To the depths of the earth, Among the children of men who go down to the Pit.'

Ezekiel 31:15 "Thus says the Lord God: 'In the day when it went down to hell, I caused mourning. I covered the deep because of it. I restrained its rivers, and the great waters were held back. I caused Lebanon to mourn for it, and all the trees of the field wilted because of it.

Ezekiel 31:16 I made the nations shake at the sound of its fall, when I cast it down to hell together with those who descend into the Pit; and all the trees of Eden, the choice and best of Lebanon, all that drink water, were comforted in the depths of the earth.

Ezekiel 31:17 They also went down to hell with it, with those slain by the sword; and those who were its strong arm dwelt in its shadows among the nations.

Ezekiel 31:18 'To which of the trees in Eden will you then be likened in glory and greatness? Yet you shall be brought down with the trees of Eden to the depths of the earth; you shall lie in the midst of the uncircumcised, with those slain by the sword. This is Pharaoh and all his multitude,' says the Lord God."

God ordained Assyria's fall. You can read about it in the Old Testament Book of Nahum. The city of Nineveh fell to Nabopolassar (Nebuchadnezzar's father) in 612BC, and the rest of the Assyrian army was crushed by Nebuchadnezzar in 609BC.

Assyria's sin was pride. Egypt's sin was pride. Later, Nebuchadnezzar's sin would be pride and God would cut him down, causing him to be driven out to the fields for seven seasons to live like a wild beast.

Note to self: Avoid pride! But how?

The way to defeat pride is to understand humility. One way to define humility is to have a proper view of yourself. But in another sense humility is not primarily an attitude towards or about yourself. It is an attitude about God.

One author put it this way:

Humility is... an illusive virtue. As soon as you think you've got it, you don't. That's part of the problem: When I finally achieve humility, I get proud of myself. My humility cries out for recognition. Humility is terribly fragile.

Part of the reason for this elusiveness is that humility has a difficult time co-existing with self-awareness. **True humility comes when we are consumed with awareness of Another.**

True humility is an acknowledgement that I must depend upon God for all things. It is to understand my total inability to do anything for God apart from His grace.

Humility isn't denying the gifting or calling you have but admitting that the gifting and calling is from God and the power comes *through* you and not *from* you.

The great Bible passage on humility is Philippians 2:5-8 where Jesus is described as taking upon Himself the nature of a servant and humbling Himself in dependence upon the Father even unto death on the Cross. The best way to understand humility, then, is to see the life of Jesus Christ - to study Him, to follow Him in His walk on the earth.

Two qualities, or you might say measures, of true, biblical humility are therefore submission to authority and servanthood. If I am not joyfully submitted to authority, I am not humble. If I am not gracefully serving others, I am not humble. Period!

In chapter 32 Egypt's judgement is compared to the trapping of animals.

Ezekiel 32:1 And it came to pass in the twelfth year, in the twelfth month, on the first day of the month, that the word of the Lord came to me, saying,

Ezekiel 32:2 "Son of man, take up a lamentation for Pharaoh king of Egypt, and say to him: 'You are like a young lion among the nations, And you are like a monster in the seas, Bursting forth in your rivers, Troubling the waters with your feet, And fouling their rivers.'

Ezekiel 32:3 "Thus says the Lord God: 'I will therefore spread My net over you with a company of many people, And they will draw you up in My net.

Ezekiel 32:4 Then I will leave you on the land; I will cast you out on the open fields, And cause to settle on you all the birds of the heavens. And with you I will fill the beasts of the whole earth.

Ezekiel 32:5 I will lay your flesh on the mountains, And fill the valleys with your carcass.

The date was March 3, 585BC. It was two months after the news of Jerusalem's fall reached the captives in Babylon. The fall of Egypt was now so certain that Ezekiel was told to take up a lament concerning Pharaoh king of Egypt. As you know, a lament, or funeral dirge, was usually delivered when one was buried.

In addition to being compared to a crocodile again, Egypt is compared to a lion. Then, in verse thirteen, a mention is made of the destruction of "all its animals."

A final word is given in verses seventeen and eighteen:

Ezekiel 32:17 It came to pass also in the twelfth year, on the fifteenth day of the month, that the word of the Lord came to me, saying:

Ezekiel 32:18 "Son of man, wail over the multitude of Egypt, And cast them down to the depths of the earth, Her and the daughters of the famous nations, With those who go down to the Pit:

The date of this message was March 17, 585BC, exactly two weeks after the preceding message. The message's theme was the consignment of the hosts of Egypt to "the Pit," language that indicated her physical destruction would pale in comparison to being separated from God in the afterlife.

God will catch Egypt in His net and throw her into the Pit.

It's reminiscent of another lion. Satan is described, is he not, as a roaring lion. During the Great Tribulation he will have his way on the earth, devouring. But when Jesus Christ returns in His Second Coming, Satan will be easily caught and cast into the Abyss. Later, after the one thousand year kingdom of God on earth, he will be released, caught, then thrown for eternity into the Lake of Fire.

Mean time we are told to resist him. How?

James 4:6 But He gives more grace. Therefore He says: "GOD RESISTS THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE."

James 4:7 Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.

These are just the things we've been talking about - Humility as measured by submitting to God.

Since the devil's sin was pride, humility will confound him, defeat him. Stay humble, that is, dependent upon the grace of God. Take a measure of yourself to see if you are joyfully submitted to authority and gracefully serving others.

