



# Book of Ezekiel

## Chapter 31

*Theme: Judgment against Pharaoh; Pharaoh's  
greatness and glory; Pharaoh's fall*

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**Theme:** Judgment against Pharaoh; Pharaoh's greatness and glory; Pharaoh's fall; lamentation over the fall.

Chapter 31 is more of Egypt, it specifically focuses on the lament of the fall of Pharaoh.

This chapter is a whole oracle composed of three sections. The argument the prophet presented was simple. Egypt boasted in its greatness, yet Egypt wasn't as great as Assyria, and Assyria was conquered by Babylon. Conclusion: if Babylon can conquer Assyria, Babylon can conquer Egypt.

**Assyria And Egypt Are Trees:** God says to Egypt that they can be likened to Assyria. Both could be equated with tall trees, prideful in their beauty, height, and strength. And because God hates pride, He will give Egypt over to the nations in the same way He gave Assyria over.

In the present chapter, the overthrow of a major *land* power is predicted (in contrast to the *sea* power in ch. 26). Ezekiel again uses allegory, now to describe Pharaoh, representing Egypt, as a mighty cedar, reaching to the clouds, in whose shelter the beasts and birds lodged (vv. 1-9). In the allegory the proud cedar is cut down and despoiled as a warning to the other trees, i.e., nations (vv. 10-14). Nature shudders at the fall of the tree, while the trees in the nether world are comforted at its descent (vv. 15-18).<sup>1</sup>

### **McGee Introduction: JUDGMENT AGAINST PHARAOH**

These two chapters conclude the section regarding the judgment of Egypt (chs. 29–32). It is interesting that Ezekiel devotes four chapters to Egypt and also Isaiah and Jeremiah and the minor prophets deal with Egypt. Egypt looms large in the history of the nation Israel. It is rather ironic that Egypt is such a thorn in the flesh to Israel at the present time. Egypt, in fact, is a dog in the manger. Israel didn't want the Baby in the manger; so it got the dog in the manger!

In chapter 31 we see the fall of Pharaoh. It is described in a parabolic form and represents both Pharaoh and his subjects. Verses 1–9 give the greatness and glory of Pharaoh in Egypt; verses 10–14 give the fall of Egypt in the parable of the tree; and verses 15–18 give the lamentation over the fall of the tree and the crisis which came to the nations of the world because of it. It had the same effect in that day as it would at the present time if the United States were destroyed overnight. That would certainly change the situation in the world, I am sure.

I trust you have seen how important the Book of Ezekiel is. It is a book that reveals the glory of the Lord and the fact that our God is a holy God who will judge sin. Now God is merciful, and He is kind. He loves mankind; He wants to save the human family, and He is not willing that any should perish, but He also judges sin. He intends to judge, and He will not spare you if you reject His gracious offer. That is what happened to Israel, and that is what happened to Egypt. Egypt was judged on the basis of the light she had, and she had been given a great deal of light.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Pfeiffer, C. F. (1962). *The Wycliffe Bible commentary : Old Testament* (Eze 31:1). Chicago: Moody Press.

<sup>2</sup> McGee, J. V. (1997). *Thru the Bible commentary* (electronic ed.) (Eze 30:22). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

**ESV Introduction:** The Fall of Pharaoh. Ezekiel's fifth oracle against Egypt dates to June 587 b.c., thus only a few weeks after the preceding unit. Here the prophet points to Assyria as an object lesson to Egypt. In its dying days, the once-mighty Assyrian Empire looked to Egypt for help against the mounting power of Babylon (c. 610 b.c.). Even together they could not withstand the Babylonian onslaught. That had been a mere 23 years earlier, well within living memory. In Isaiah's prophecies, given earlier still, Assyria—pride personified—was chopped down by the axe of the Lord (Isa. 10:5–19). This, the prophet says, is the fate awaiting Egypt. The motif of the “cosmic tree” that harbors the nations in its branches uses elements from ancient mythology, much as does the oracle of Tyre in the “garden of God” (see Ezek. 28:11–19).

**Chuck Smith:** In chapters 29 and 30 of Ezekiel, he was prophesying concerning the judgment of God that was to come against the nation of Egypt, who was like a reed when Israel sought to lean upon it, it broke and only injured Israel. They were, of course, warned about leaning upon Egypt, but the warnings were not heeded and thus Egypt became as a broken staff and did not really help Israel except only temporarily when Pharaoh Haaibre came against Babylon for a time and they stopped the siege against Jerusalem for a short period.

Now in chapter 31 he begins a prophecy against the Pharaoh himself. And in this prophecy against the Pharaoh, he turns to more or less a parable in which he likens the Egyptian leader to a great cedar tree in Lebanon. Now Lebanon used to be famous for its huge cedar trees. And, of course, you remember that the king of Tyre, Hiram, made a covenant with Solomon to provide the cedars, with David and with Solomon to provide the cedars for the building of the temple in Jerusalem. And so in a parabolic way, the Lord speaks of the parable, really, of the Pharaoh as a giant cedar in Lebanon.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Chuck Smith, Notes on Ezekiel, Pastor/Founder Calvary Chapel, Costa Mesa CA

### **Ezekiel 31:1**

**And it came to pass in the eleventh year, in the third month, in the first day of the month, that the word of the LORD came unto me, saying,**

This was in June of 583 B.C. It turns out to be about 2 months before the fall of Jerusalem.

**Dake:** [eleventh year] The 11th year of the captivity was about 3 months before the fall of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar (2 Kings 25:2-3).

**Constable:** The Lord gave Ezekiel a third oracle against Egypt on June 21, 587 B.C., less than two months after the previous one (30:20-26).<sup>4</sup>

### **Ezekiel 31:2**

**Son of man, speak unto Pharaoh king of Egypt, and to his multitude; Whom art thou like in thy greatness?**

**Constable:** The prophet was to speak this one to Pharaoh Hophra and to the Egyptians. Obviously Ezekiel was in Babylon and they were in Egypt, but he was to speak publicly as though he were addressing them in person. He asked rhetorically who the Egyptians were like in their greatness.<sup>5</sup>

**McGee:** God recognized the greatness of Egypt—probably over a couple of millenniums this vast kingdom had dominated the world. It was the breadbasket for the world because it did not have to depend on the rainfall. The Nile River overflowed each year to water their crops. It was a nation of tremendous power.<sup>6</sup>

The oracle begins with a rhetorical question: “Whom are you like in your greatness?” Only Assyria was comparable to Egypt in pomp and power. Ezekiel compared Assyria to a giant cedar tree with beautiful and shady foliage. This tree was exalted above all the trees of the forest, i.e., every other kingdom. The numerous boughs and long branches provided shelter for bird and beast alike, i.e., “all great nations lived under its shade” (31:3–6).<sup>7</sup>

The notice of Pharaoh and his multitude is repeated in v. 18b, but there as a statement rather than an address. Likewise, the rhetorical question in v. 2b is posed again and expanded in v. 18a. This provides an effective frame around the intervening verses.

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<sup>4</sup> Dr. Thomas Constable, Notes on Ezekiel, 2010 Edition, <http://www.soniclight.com/constable/notes.htm>

<sup>5</sup> Dr. Thomas Constable, Notes on Ezekiel, 2010 Edition, <http://www.soniclight.com/constable/notes.htm>

<sup>6</sup> McGee, J. V. (1997). *Thru the Bible commentary* (electronic ed.) (Eze 31:2). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

<sup>7</sup> Smith, J. E. (1992). *The Major Prophets* (Eze 31:1–18). Joplin, Mo.: College Press.

**Chuck Smith:** Egypt, of course, was a great, powerful empire in the ancient world. It was one of the world empires, or the world-dominating, or leading empires, and always a force to be reckoned with. "Who are you like?" And he likens them unto the Assyrians, who were also a great world power. It was the Assyrians who conquered over the Northern Kingdom of Israel. And so they are like unto Assyria.

### **Ezekiel 31:3**

**Behold, the Assyrian was a cedar in Lebanon with fair branches, and with a shadowing shroud, and of an high stature; and his top was among the thick boughs.**

**Constable:** They were similar to the Assyrians who had towered among the nations as a beautiful cedar of Lebanon (cf. 17:1-10, 22-24; 19:10-14; 26:19-21; 28:11-19; Isa. 14:3-21). Some of the Lebanese cedars grew 80 feet high, were beautifully symmetrical, and contained thickly interwoven branches.<sup>445</sup>

Assyria had been one of the greatest nations in history before its fall in 612 B.C., perhaps the greatest nation. It was of particular interest to the Egyptians for two reasons. It had been the only Mesopotamian nation to invade Egypt successfully. The Assyrians destroyed Thebes in 633 B.C. (cf. Nah. 3:8-10) and eventually incorporated Egypt into its empire. Second, Assyria had fallen to the Babylonians, the same enemy that now threatened Egypt. The city of Nineveh fell to Nabopolassar, Nebuchadnezzar's father, in 612 B.C., and Nebuchadnezzar crushed the rest of the Assyrian army at Haran in 609 B.C.<sup>8</sup>

**Missler:** We will see analogies here to trees. One thing we probably miss are the puns used. The Assyrian was compared to a cedar in Lebanon, and of course that was something to envy. The cedars of Lebanon were legend.<sup>9</sup>

**Net Bible:** Either Egypt, or the Lord compares Egypt to Assyria, which is described in vv. 3-17 through the metaphor of a majestic tree. See D. I. Block, *Ezekiel* (NICOT), 2:185. Like Egypt, Assyria had been a great world power, but in time God brought the Assyrians down. Egypt should learn from history the lesson that no nation, no matter how powerful, can withstand the judgment of God. Rather than following the text here, some prefer to emend the proper name Assyria to a similar sounding common noun meaning "boxwood" (see Ezek 27:6), which would make a fitting parallel to "cedar of Lebanon" in the following line. In this case vv. 3-18 in their entirety refer to Egypt, not Assyria. See L. C. Allen, *Ezekiel* (WBC), 2:121-27.<sup>10</sup>

Lebanon was know for its cedar trees (Judg 9:15; 1 Kgs 4:33; 5:6; 2 Kgs 14:9; Ezra 3:7; Pss 29:5; 92:12; 104:16).

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<sup>8</sup> Dr. Thomas Constable, Notes on Ezekiel, 2010 Edition, <http://www.soniclight.com/constable/notes.htm>

<sup>9</sup> Chuck Missler, Notes on Ezekiel, [khouse.org](http://khouse.org)

<sup>10</sup> <http://net.bible.org/#!/bible/Ezekiel+31>

This chapter is a long historical record of God's dealings with the Assyrians (Ezekiel 31:3-17), with a final prophecy revealing that Pharaoh and all his multitude would perish like the Assyrian king and his army (Ezekiel 31:18). The Assyrian is compared to a great cedar of Lebanon, one growing taller than any other because of being planted by many waters. The waters made him great, and he became a dwelling place for fowls of the heavens and beasts of the fields. He even overshadowed great nations (Ezekiel 31:3-6); he became greater than the cedars of the garden of God; and no tree was like him in beauty, so that all the trees of Eden envied him (Ezekiel 31:7-9).

**LAN:** This message was given in 587 B.C. Ezekiel compared Egypt to Assyria, calling Assyria a great cedar tree. The Egyptians were to look at the fall of the mighty nation of Assyria (whose demise they had seen) as an example of what would happen to them. Just like Assyria, Egypt took pride in its strength and beauty; this would be its downfall. She would crash like a mighty tree and be sent to the place of the dead. There is no permanence apart from God, even for a great society with magnificent culture and military power.<sup>11</sup>

Ezekiel offered an example against whom Egypt could compare herself: **Consider Assyria.** Some scholars think that “Assyria” (*aššûr*) should be emended to read “cypress tree” (or “pine tree”) (*te’ aššûr*) because of the difficulty in understanding why Ezekiel would mention Assyria in his prophecies against Egypt. However, there is no need to alter the text. Assyria would have had great significance to Egypt for two reasons. First, Assyria had been the only Mesopotamian nation to invade Egypt. In 633 B.C. Assyria had entered Egypt and destroyed the capital of Thebes (cf. Nahum 3:8-10). So the only nation that could be “compared” with Egypt was Assyria. Second, Assyria had been destroyed by Babylon, the same nation Ezekiel said would enter Egypt and destroy it.<sup>12</sup>

Ezekiel compared Assyria to a cedar in Lebanon. (A lofty cedar also depicted the leaders of Israel; cf. Ezek. 17.) At the apex of her power Assyria dominated the Middle East, towering like a cedar higher than all the trees of the field (31:5). 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 . . . deep springs (v. 4), and abundant waters (vv. 5, 7). Birds in the cedar’s branches and animals under its shade (v. 6; cf. vv. 12, 17) speak of Assyria, like a tall tree, overshadowing and protecting all her neighbors.<sup>13</sup>

**McGee:** God says, “I liken Assyria, that great nation in the north, to a great cedar tree.” Now there is more than one tree in a forest, because one tree won’t make a forest. Assyria stood way above the other trees and dominated. But God brought Assyria down. This message should have gotten through to Pharaoh and his people. Pharaoh, too, is a great tree. He has dominated everything. The people of Egypt are great, but now they are going

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<sup>11</sup> Life Application Bible Notes

<sup>12</sup> Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (Eze 31:1–9). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

<sup>13</sup> Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (Eze 31:1–9). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

to be brought low. As we saw in chapter 29, Egypt is going to become a base kingdom. Well, for a period of over two thousand years now it has been a base kingdom. It will never be a world empire again.<sup>14</sup>

Egypt was compared to Assyria in greatness and presumably in its great pride over its achievements. Ezekiel uses another allegory (see 15:1–8; 17:1–10): Assyria as a cedar in Lebanon. This image pictures the nations as trees in a forest in Lebanon (a country prized for its cedar trees; see vv. 15–18; 1 Kin. 5:7–10; 7:2, 3; Ps. 29:5). Assyria at one time was the highest tree, but it had been cut down. Its capital city Nineveh fell in 612 B.C., signaling the end of Assyrian domination and the beginning of neo-Babylonian control of the ancient Middle East.

**ESV:** Some find the reference to Assyria problematic, expecting rather immediate application to Egypt. However, the text is stable and clear, and there is no support from the ancient translations for suggested textual corrections (which are themselves not free from interpretative problems).

### **Ezekiel 31:4**

**The waters made him great, the deep set him up on high with her rivers running round about his plants, and sent out her little rivers unto all the trees of the field.**

**Missler:** Two waters: Tigris and Euphrates, watering the trees at the base of a valley. The water is feeding the great empires in terms of the great rivers.

**Constable 4-5:** Like Egypt, Assyria received much of its strength and power from the waters that surrounded it, the Nile in Egypt's case and the Tigris in Assyria's. The waters that nourished these nations enabled them to grow strong and to tower above many others. The network of supporting nations that surrounded both Assyria and Egypt contributed to their strength and growth in another way.<sup>15</sup>

“Waters made it grow; the deep made it grow tall. It (the deep) was flowing with its rivers around the place it (the tree) was planted, it (the deep) sent out its channels to all the trees of the field.”

**Nelson:** The **waters** were the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. These mighty rivers brought agricultural fertility and fostered the development of great cities along trade routes (see vv. 8, 9; 15–18; Gen. 2:10–14).<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> McGee, J. V. (1997). *Thru the Bible commentary* (electronic ed.) (Eze 31:3). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

<sup>15</sup> Dr. Thomas Constable, Notes on Ezekiel, 2010 Edition, <http://www.soniclight.com/constable/notes.htm>

<sup>16</sup> The Nelson Study Bible

### **Ezekiel 31:5**

**Therefore his height was exalted above all the trees of the field, and his boughs were multiplied, and his branches became long because of the multitude of waters, when he shot forth.**

“when it sends forth.” Repointing the consonants of the Masoretic text would render the proposed reading “shoots” (cf. NRSV).

The unparalleled greatness of Assyria is portrayed with vivid poetic images. There is both comparison and contrast with Egypt. Before turning to the mostly narrative explanation in vv. 10–18, the prophet indicates that although Egypt was great, it was not the greatest nation. If Assyria had fallen to Babylon, no hope would remain for Egypt (see 31:18).

**Chuck Smith 5-6:** So Egypt was one of the great nations and overshadowed the other nations. Notice the parable here, the birds lodged in the branches. This is also said by Daniel of Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonian kingdom. But bringing it into the New Testament, we remember Jesus gave a kingdom parable, "The kingdom of heaven is like unto a mustard seed, which is a small little seed, but it was planted and it grew into a tree. And the birds of the air came and lodged in it" (Luke 13:19). Now, in a parabolic way, birds are always thought of in an evil sense. You remember that when the seed was planted and it fell by the wayside, the birds of the air plucked it up so that it wasn't able to take root and they were likened unto the evil one who comes and plucks the Word of God out of a person's heart so that it doesn't have any effect.

So in that kingdom parable of the mustard seed that grew into a tree, first of all, that is abnormal. A mustard seed is not a tree seed, it is a bush, but there was this abnormal growth. It grew into a tree and all of the birds came and lodged in it. Is a parable, really, of the Gentile church that would become a haven for every kind of bird that exists. And so we look at the Gentile church today and see all the weird birds lodging in its branches. It's amazing the things that have been brought into the church, incorporated as a part of Christianity, and the people who have taken on the name or the title of Christian. But, of course, it certainly reminds us of what Jesus said, "Not all who say, 'Lord, Lord,' are going to enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 7:21). So Jesus is referring to the fact that as the Gentile church grows, the abnormal type of growth, that it is not a healthy, solid growth, that it is become the haven for birds.

Now here, "The fowls of the heaven made their nest in the boughs." That is, these other nations conquered by... these other peoples conquered by Egypt.

### **Ezekiel 31:6**

**All the fowls of heaven made their nests in his boughs, and under his branches did all the beasts of the field bring forth their young, and under his shadow dwelt all great nations.**

In Matthew 13 the fowls of the air nested in the branches of a mustard plant which grew unnaturally into a monstrosity large enough to support them. The birds there are identified as the ministers of Satan. They were the vulture-types of fowl.<sup>17</sup>

Many peoples and nations benefited from the mighty kingdom of Assyria symbolized by the birds and beasts that took refuge under this tree (cf. vv. 12, 13; 17:23; Dan. 4:12; Matt. 13:32).

### **Ezekiel 31:7**

**Thus was he fair in his greatness, in the length of his branches: for his root was by great waters.**

**Constable 7-9:** Assyria was beautiful and graceful because of the waters that sustained it, waters that were solely a gift of God's grace. No tree in God's garden of nations could compare with it. The other kingdoms were jealous of Assyria, which was preeminent in God's Eden-like collection of nations.<sup>18</sup>

### **Ezekiel 31:8**

**The cedars in the garden of God could not hide him: the fir trees were not like his boughs, and the chestnut trees were not like his branches; nor any tree in the garden of God was like unto him in his beauty.**

*Heb* “acting he has acted with regard to it.” The infinitive absolute precedes the main verb to emphasize the certainty and decisiveness of the action depicted.

No other tree in the “garden of God,” i.e., the world, could compare to it. In fact all other trees (nations) were jealous of the giant cedar. As part of God’s garden, the kingdoms of this world needed to recognize that they had been planted and nurtured by the Lord. The cedar (Assyria) spread its branches and boasted of its beauty. The cedar forgot the source of its life. By extolling the beauty and majesty of the cedar, Ezekiel condemned the proud spirit of Assyria and of Pharaoh who was like Assyria (31:7–9).<sup>19</sup>

**ESV 8–9:** The garden of God is mentioned three times. As in 28:13 (see note), this garden is identified with Eden (also 31:16, 18). **I** (God) made it beautiful, leaving no room for self-exaltation (v. 9).

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<sup>17</sup> Chuck Missler, Notes on Ezekiel, [khouse.org](http://khouse.org)

<sup>18</sup> Dr. Thomas Constable, Notes on Ezekiel, 2010 Edition, <http://www.soniclight.com/constable/notes.htm>

<sup>19</sup> Smith, J. E. (1992). *The Major Prophets* (Eze 31:1–18). Joplin, Mo.: College Press.

### **Ezekiel 31:9**

**I have made him fair by the multitude of his branches: so that all the trees of Eden, that were in the garden of God, envied him.**

“All the trees of Eden” may refer to all the other nations of the world who were jealous of Assyria’s power and grandeur.

### **Ezekiel 31:10**

**Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD; Because thou hast lifted up thyself in height, and he hath shot up his top among the thick boughs, and his heart is lifted up in his height;**

**10-11:** However, because Assyria was a proud nation, the Lord had determined to turn it over to a strong individual who would cut it down, namely, Nebuchadnezzar. God had driven it out of His Eden as He had driven Adam and Eve out for their pride.

After picturing the Assyrian empire of the past as a tree more beautiful and great than any other on earth (Ezekiel 31:3-9), God revealed the reason for its destruction (Ezekiel 31:10-14). Because you have lifted up yourself in height, and your heart is exalted very high, I have delivered you into the hand of the mighty one of the heathen (Ezekiel 31:10-11). Assyria, the great power of Asia for four centuries, was destroyed by the Babylonians and Medes before the Egyptians were defeated by Nebuchadnezzar at the battle of Carchemish on the river Euphrates (Jeremiah 46:2). This reference to the defeat of the mighty Assyrian empire was a warning to Egypt that her day of defeat was also coming, when her land would be invaded and made waste

The phrase, “Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD,” indicates the divisions in this chapter. In this division we see that Pharaoh is lifted up in pride. Pride is in the human heart, and his greatness blinded him to the danger that he was in.

The Assyrian king had an ego which matched the might of his empire. The cedar’s heart was “haughty in its loftiness.” Therefore, the Lord had delivered the Assyrian king into the hand of “a despot of the nations,” i.e., Nebuchadnezzar. The giant tree had been cut down. Its remains filled mountains and valleys. People had abandoned the tree. Birds and beasts fed on its remains. This happened to Assyria so that no other tree should exalt itself in its height. Nations must learn that they are mortal. In time they will die and descend into the lower parts of the earth—the pit, i.e., they will depart the scene of history.<sup>20</sup>

Because Assyria gloated over her greatness, God sentenced this cruel nation to harsh treatment and subjection under Babylon, the mighty one of the nations. I will deliver: The past tense, “I delivered,” would be more accurate for this context. The meaning is that Babylon, the terrible nation, had cut Assyria down. The picturesque conclusion to this

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<sup>20</sup> Smith, J. E. (1992). *The Major Prophets* (Eze 31:1–18). Joplin, Mo.: College Press.

second message of ch. 31 indicates that all the other nations (birds, beasts, and trees) that observed Assyria's ruin would share its destiny of death, depths, and the Pit, and would never attain its heights of power.

**ESV 10–14:** Pride precedes the fall, here brought about by the agency of a mighty one of the nations (v. 11), paralleled by the most ruthless of nations (v. 12), elsewhere a cryptic code for Babylon (28:7). Those who once prospered in Egypt's shadow now languish on its remains; no longer is it able to sustain life. The closing mention of those who go down to the pit (cf. 26:19–21) provides a bridge into the next paragraph.

**Chuck Smith 10-11:** So the Pharaoh, judgment is pronounced upon him and again the reason for the judgment, notice carefully, is his pride. Because his heart was lifted up for his height, for his greatness. "Pride cometh before destruction, a haughty spirit before the fall" (Proverbs 16:18).

It is extremely difficult for men to handle a position of power or authority. I think one of the hardest things in the world is to be in a position of ruling over other men, because there is always that danger of pride coming in. And looking at your position and saying, "Look what I have done."

You remember, and we'll get to it, you remember it trustfully, for about four years ago when we were in Daniel and we'll be getting there pretty soon again, when Nebuchadnezzar was looking over Babylon, no doubt walking through the hanging gardens, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, and walking through this beautiful garden and this fabulous city that he had built, walls three hundred feet high, eighty feet thick. And he said, "Is not this the great Babylon that I have built?" And a voice came from heaven saying, "Hey, the watchers have been watching you, and your heart has been lifted up with pride." And Nebuchadnezzar came to Daniel and said, you know, told him of this experience of hearing this voice saying that the watchers had been watching and saw his pride and God was going to bring him into judgment, and Daniel says, "Hey, walk carefully. Be careful." About a year later, again old Nebuchadnezzar was boasting in his greatness, "The great Babylon that I have built," and the voice came from heaven and said, "That's it, you've had it." And he had a period of insanity where for seven seasons he lived with the animals in the field. He ate grass like the oxen. His hair grew like feathers, and the dew of the heaven settled on him. And he lived like a wild man until he knew that the God in heaven is the one who sets upon the kingdoms those whom He will.

The pride was the thing that brought Nebuchadnezzar to this place of being broken, until seven seasons had passed over him, and then God restored and he made that tremendous proclamation, declaring his belief and faith in the God of heaven who establishes upon the kingdoms those whom He would. Now, all the way along through history, from the beginning, pride is a destroyer. It has destroyed so many. Shakespeare has the statement in one of his plays, "Cromwell, flee from pride, for by this sin did the angels fall." Satan said, "I will exalt my throne." And here is the Pharaoh of Egypt being lifted up with pride, and yet, God says, "I will destroy, I will deliver him to the hand of mighty one of the heathen, and he shall surely deal with him. And I have driven him out for his wickedness." So God was to use Nebuchadnezzar the mighty one of the heathen to destroy the Pharaoh.

And, of course, Jeremiah was making a similar prophecy. He was telling those in Jerusalem, "Now don't trust in the Pharaoh. Don't lean upon Egypt. For Egypt also will be destroyed by Babylon. Egypt will not be a real help." And, of course, they wouldn't listen to Jeremiah and they finally, of course, went down to Egypt, and there at Tahpanhes, he took and put these rocks down and he said, "Above these rocks," he buried these rocks. He said, "Above these rocks Nebuchadnezzar will build his throne and rule in Egypt." And, of course, it was fulfilled.

### **Ezekiel 31:11**

**I have therefore delivered him into the hand of the mighty one of the heathen; he shall surely deal with him: I have driven him out for his wickedness.**

**Missler:** You can detect a subtle tone here somewhat analogous to Ezekiel 28 where clearly God reaches through the king of Tyre and those idioms, to speak to Satan. There are hints of that same kind of thing here, but not as strong. Daniel 10 presents an angelic messenger, a bizarre, supernatural conflict going on invisibly behind the powers that be in the world. That same perspective is behind the Pharaoh of Egypt.<sup>21</sup>

**Clarke: The mighty one of the heathen**—Nebuchadnezzar. It is worthy of notice, that Nebuchadnezzar, in the first year of his reign, rendered himself master of Nineveh, the capital of the Assyrian empire. See Sedar Olam. This happened about twenty years before Ezekiel delivered this prophecy; on this account, Ashshur, verse 3, may relate to the Assyrians, to whom it is possible the prophet here compares the Egyptians.<sup>22</sup>

The “ruler of the nations” may be Nebuchadnezzar (see Daniel 2:37-38).

**McGee:** At this point in history who is the mighty one of the nations? It is Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon. I don't think Ezekiel is speaking about Satan because Satan has had Egypt for years, so this wasn't something new. If you want to confirm the fact that this “mighty one” was Nebuchadnezzar, read the Book of Daniel. Daniel said to king Nebuchadnezzar, “You are the head of gold”—the greatness of this man has not been exceeded.

“I have therefore delivered him,” he is talking about Pharaoh of Egypt. God is going to deal with him; He is going to drive him out because of his wickedness.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Chuck Missler, Notes on Ezekiel, khouse.org

<sup>22</sup> Adam Clarke's Commentary on the Old Testament

<sup>23</sup> McGee, J. V. (1997). *Thru the Bible commentary* (electronic ed.) (Eze 31:11). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

### **Ezekiel 31:12**

**And strangers, the terrible of the nations, have cut him off, and have left him: upon the mountains and in all the valleys his branches are fallen, and his boughs are broken by all the rivers of the land; and all the people of the earth are gone down from his shadow, and have left him.**

**Constable 12-13:** Alien tyrants from other nations had cut off parts of Assyria and left it laying like a tree with its limbs chopped off in a valley. Assyria had a reputation for being an extremely cruel nation, and the other nations had dealt with it ruthlessly. The people of the earth who had taken refuge in Assyria like birds and beasts under a tree had fled from under it but continued to use its remains to their own advantage.<sup>24</sup>

Here we have a picture of the result of the defeat of Assyria: the beautiful and proud cedar cut down, his branches cut off and strewn all over the mountains and valleys, the people of the earth who once trusted in him having fled from him, and only the birds and beasts remaining among the ruins (Ezekiel 31:12-13).

Egypt would be taken, and it would be a shock to the world.

### **Ezekiel 31:13**

**Upon his ruin shall all the fowls of the heaven remain, and all the beasts of the field shall be upon his branches:**

**Upon his ruin shall all the fowls**—The fall of Egypt is likened to the fall of a great tree; and as the fowls and beasts sheltered under its branches before, verse 6, so they now feed upon its ruins.

### **Ezekiel 31:14**

**To the end that none of all the trees by the waters exalt themselves for their height, neither shoot up their top among the thick boughs, neither their trees stand up in their height, all that drink water: for they are all delivered unto death, to the nether parts of the earth, in the midst of the children of men, with them that go down to the pit.**

This fate had befallen Assyria in part so other greatly blessed, proud nations would learn not to exalt themselves. All nations, like trees, eventually fall down and return to oblivion like human corpses do to the dust.

The purpose of the destruction of Assyria was to warn all the other great trees not to be lifted up in pride, lest they also be destroyed.

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<sup>24</sup> Dr. Thomas Constable, Notes on Ezekiel, 2010 Edition, <http://www.soniclight.com/constable/notes.htm>

**To the end that none of all the trees**—Let this ruin, fallen upon Egypt, teach all the nations that shall hear of it to be humble, because, however elevated, God can soon bring them down; and pride and arrogance, either in states or individuals, have the peculiar abhorrence of God. Pride does not suit the sons of men; it made devils of angels, and makes fiends of men.

There are a number of references to the underworld in this paragraph (cf. note at 26:20). The nether world (*.ereš taḥtîṭ*) is located deep down in the earth (26:20; 31:14, 16, 18; 32:18, 24). **The pit** (*bôr*). A name given to the underworld because the grave was the mouth of it. It designates the entrance to Sheol, and is often a parallel world for it (26:20; 31:14, 16; 32:18, 23, 24, 25, 29, 30). **Hell** or *Sheol* (“place of inquiry” for necromancy; place that insatiably “asks,” Prov 20:15, 16; “hollow place,” “underworld”). The vast burying place in the earth, full of graves ( 31:15, 16, 17; 32:21, 27. Cf. *shaḥat*, 28:9).<sup>25</sup>

Assyria’s fall was an object lesson to other nations. No other trees so well-watered are ever to reach such a height (v. 14). Egypt’s desire to become a lasting great power in the Middle East was destined to failure. She and all other nations were **destined for the grave (death and the pit)** instead of glory. (The “pit” is the place of the departed dead; see comments on 26:20-21.) No nation should exalt itself highly over others because they will all suffer Assyria’s fate.<sup>26</sup>

### **Ezekiel 31:15**

**Thus saith the Lord GOD; In the day when he went down to the grave I caused a mourning: I covered the deep for him, and I restrained the floods thereof, and the great waters were stayed: and I caused Lebanon to mourn for him, and all the trees of the field fainted for him.**

**Constable:** On the day that God humbled Assyria, He caused many people and nations to mourn her demise. He made it impossible for that nation to revive; He did the same thing as burying it in the sea, and He kept its lifegiving waters from revitalizing it. The people in the area from which Assyria had come, Mesopotamia, mourned for it, and other nations (trees) wilted because of its fall.

**caused a mourning:** *Heb* “I caused lamentation.” D. I. Block (*Ezekiel* [NICOT], 2:194-95) proposes an alternative root which would give the meaning “I gated back the waters,” i.e., shut off the water supply.

**[grave]** Hebrew: *Sheowl* (HSN-7585), the unseen world of departed spirits, where there is full consciousness of the souls and spirits of men after death. It is not the

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<sup>25</sup> Pfeiffer, C. F. (1962). *The Wycliffe Bible commentary : Old Testament* (Eze 31:15). Chicago: Moody Press.

<sup>26</sup> Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (Eze 31:10–14). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

grave, the place of the body. *hades* or the world of the dead (as if a subterranean *retreat*), including its accessories and inmates :- grave, hell, pit.

**McGee:** This is a very remarkable section of the Word of God. If you are a student of the Word, I recommend that you spend a great deal of time here.

The word “grave” in this verse is *sheol*. This verse speaks of Pharaoh who is going to go down in defeat and be killed. Sheol, although at times does mean the grave, means here the unseen world, the unknown region, or the abode of the dead—not just the grave where the physical body is placed after death. It is the place where the spirit goes. You remember that Solomon spoke about the fact that the body returns to the earth, and the spirit goes to God: “Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it” (Eccl. 12:7). The human body is nothing in the world but dust. Speaking of man the psalmist says, “For he [God] knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust” (Ps. 103:14). Sometimes we forget we are only dust, and when dust gets stuck on itself, it becomes mud! We need to remember that as far as our bodies are concerned, they are dust. When we put our bodies in the ground, they will go back to dust. The Lord Jesus spoke of the fact that when a believer dies his body sleeps. And Paul speaks of the physical body as sleeping in 1 Thessalonians 4:13.

Where do the spirits of the lost go? They, too, go to sheol, the unseen world. We know from a parable—which is also a true-life story which Jesus told (Luke 16:19–31) about two men who died—that sheol is divided into two compartments. One is called the place of torment, and that is where the rich man went. The other is called Abraham’s Bosom, which is the place where the beggar went when he died. The place of torment is not to be confused with hell or the lake of fire of the New Testament. Apparently sheol was a temporary “abode of the dead,” as the Lord Jesus emptied the section called paradise or Abraham’s Bosom when he ascended (Eph. 4:8–10). The section called the place of torment will not be emptied until all who are there will stand before the great white throne for their final judgment (Rev. 20:11–15).

With this background in mind, notice that Ezekiel gives a picture of Pharaoh going down into sheol. Remember that God is not speaking of Pharaoh’s body here. The grave receives the bodies, but the immaterial part of man, that which has endless being, goes to sheol.

“I covered the deep for him, and I restrained the floods thereof, and the great waters were stayed: and I caused Lebanon to mourn for him.” When he died, the entire world mourned. Up there in Lebanon, which was in the great nation of Phoenicia, there was great mourning. The nations of the world mourned when Egypt went down. All were dependent upon it—their economy rested upon it, and its allies were protected by it. What a picture this is!<sup>27</sup>

The fall of the great cedar caused great concern throughout “Lebanon,” i.e., the garden of God or the world. The rivers which nourished the great tree were dried up. All the other trees of Lebanon mourned and wilted away. Nations were shaken at the fall. The descent of the cedar brought comfort to the trees of Eden, the choicest and best of Lebanon, which were already in Sheol. The idea here is that previous world powers took

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<sup>27</sup> McGee, J. V. (1997). *Thru the Bible commentary* (electronic ed.) (Eze 31:15). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

consolation in the demise of Assyria. The allies of Assyria (those who were his arm, who dwelt in his shadow) also descended into Sheol (31:15–17).<sup>28</sup>

**ESV 15–17:** While the judgment entailed in these verses echoes the content of those immediately preceding, the attention to Sheol (the place of the dead) prepares the way for the longer reflection on this theme in 32:17–32.

### **Ezekiel 31:16**

**I made the nations to shake at the sound of his fall, when I cast him down to hell with them that descend into the pit: and all the trees of Eden, the choice and best of Lebanon, all that drink water, shall be comforted in the nether parts of the earth.**

The fall of Assyria created the same reaction among the nations as the felling of a mighty tree does in the forest; all the other nations (trees) quaked. The other nations also were able to grow better themselves since they no longer had to live in the shadow of mighty Assyria.

**[hell]** Hebrew: *Sheowl* (HSN-7585), the unseen world of departed spirits, where there is full consciousness of the souls and spirits of men after death. It is not the grave, the place of the body. *hades* or the world of the dead (as if a subterranean *retreat*), including its accessories and inmates :- grave, hell, pit.

**[the nether parts of the earth]** Hell is in the nether (lower) parts of the earth (Ezekiel 31:14,16; Matthew 12:20; Ephes. 4:8-10). Hebrew 8478 (tachath); *lowermost*; as noun (feminine plural) the *depths* (figurative a *pit*, the *womb*) :- low (parts, -er, -er parts, -est), nether (part).

“When I cast him down to hell [sheol] with them that descend into the pit [the grave].” Now the tree, representing Pharaoh, is cut down. And where does Pharaoh go? To sheol.

### **Ezekiel 31:17**

**They also went down into hell with him unto *them that be slain with the sword; and they that were his arm, that dwelt under his shadow in the midst of the heathen.***

Some other nations fell when Assyria did; this great tree fell on other trees and took them down with it. Some of them had even sustained Assyria and profited from Assyria's greatness, but she fell on them.

The allies of Pharaoh were to perish with him

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<sup>28</sup> Smith, J. E. (1992). *The Major Prophets* (Eze 31:1–18). Joplin, Mo.: College Press.

## **Ezekiel 31:18**

**To whom art thou thus like in glory and in greatness among the trees of Eden? yet shalt thou be brought down with the trees of Eden unto the nether parts of the earth: thou shalt lie in the midst of the uncircumcised with *them that be slain by the sword*. This is Pharaoh and all his multitude, saith the Lord GOD.**

The oracle ends with a question similar to the one with which it began (cf. v. 2): “To which among the trees of Eden are you thus equal in glory and greatness?” The point of the lengthy parable of the great cedar is simple. Regardless of his grandeur, Pharaoh would fall like others before him. He would surely descend to join the trees of Eden in Sheol, the abode of the dead. Pharaoh would “lie in the midst of the uncircumcised, with those who were slain by the sword.” Since the Egyptians practiced circumcision, to spend eternity with those who were uncircumcised would be the ultimate humiliation (31:18).<sup>29</sup>

**Constable:** For the Lord Ezekiel asked Pharaoh and the Egyptians which of the trees (nations) in God's garden they resembled. Egypt was obviously like Assyria in its greatness and pride and may have thought of itself as Assyria's equal. Nevertheless God would cut down Egypt as He had felled Assyria. The people would die among the uncircumcised, like barbarians (cf. 28:10; 29:5; 32:19, 21; Jer. 9:25-26). This was a terrible fate for people who regarded a proper burial as preparation for life beyond the grave, as the Egyptians did. The Egyptians practiced circumcision, but the Babylonians did not. They also despised foreigners. They would die by the sword in war. This would be the fate of Pharaoh and the Egyptians that Almighty God promised. If Assyria could not escape Yahweh's judgment, how could Egypt?

The story of the cedar revisits several familiar themes that occurred in the prophecies against foreign nations. First, God hates pride because it leads people and nations to ruin (Ezek 27:3; 28:2; Prov 16:18). Second, the mighty fall as do the weak (cf. 27:27-36). When the mighty fall, it is also a loss for the weak and dependant. Third, the fall of the tree was a reminder of the mortality of human beings and individual accountability to God (cf. 3:16-21; 18:1-21).

If the Jewish exiles still entertained any hope that Egypt would save them from captivity, this prophecy would have encouraged them to abandon such a dream.<sup>30</sup>

This is the point of all the chapter showing the rise, greatness, and fall of the Assyrian empire of Ezekiel 31:3-17. It was to make it known that Pharaoh and Egypt were to have a similar fate.

Pharaoh would be **brought down with** them, to **lie among the uncircumcised** (RSV). Cf. 28:10; 32:19-21. The Egyptians also practiced circumcision.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Smith, J. E. (1992). *The Major Prophets* (Eze 31:1–18). Joplin, Mo.: College Press.

<sup>30</sup> Dr. Thomas Constable, Notes on Ezekiel, 2010 Edition, <http://www.soniclight.com/constable/notes.htm>

<sup>31</sup> Pfeiffer, C. F. (1962). *The Wycliffe Bible commentary : Old Testament* (Eze 31:15). Chicago: Moody Press.

**Missler:** All the nations in this passage were symbolized or characterized by trees. In Daniel Nebuchadnezzar had a vision of a great tree. See Daniel 4:10-12, 19- 22, 28-31 and Daniel 4:1-4 where Nebuchadnezzar points out that it was due to his own pride that his kingdom was taken away for 7 years (note Daniel 4:36-37). So not only did all of this really happen to Nebuchadnezzar, but he also wrote his testimony and had it published throughout the known world!

It is interesting that the model, the idiom that God used, was a tree. How it grew so tall and then was cut down for 7 years and he was in custody, fenced in.

Now getting back to Ezekiel 31, we see the term tree was being used here for nations in general. The medium was interesting. Also, you will notice through Chapter 31 how God reached subtly through the discussion with the trees and talks about the trees of Eden. The scope of the indictment, just like in Chapter 28 where clearly it reached through and grabbed Satan by the scruff of the neck so to speak, here again, the darts of the Holy Spirit went through the idiom of just the nations to the power that was behind them.

God hates pride; pride of kings, pride of nations, your pride, and my pride. I say this as someone who has been guilty as much as anyone of assuming that my rewards or my achievements are anything other than the gifts of God. God hates pride because it robs Him of His rightful glory. We need to give God the praise and the glory and the acknowledgment that is due.

You and I are not going to be building Babylons, or ruling over large empires necessarily in the sense we are talking about here, but we all have plenty of opportunities to fall through pride. Sin started in the heart of Satan through pride, and it is Satan's ambition to have you stumble the same way he did, through pride. Do not let the remoteness of Egypt and Pharaoh cloud the message God has for us tonight. God will not fool around. He abases the proud, and gives grace to the humble.<sup>32</sup>

**McGee:** When Pharaoh got to sheol, he found other rulers that had been slain were there too.

He discovered something else: there is democracy in death. We talk a great deal today about integration. There is nothing that will integrate the rich and the poor, the black and the white, the male and the female, those at the top of the social ladder and those at the bottom of it, like *death!* Death will bring them all to the same level, not only the placing of their bodies in the grave, but also their spirits.

Probably one of the startling things to some people will be the realization that they haven't died as an animal dies. An atheist said to me, "When a man dies it is just like a dog that dies. He simply ceases to exist. There is no life after death." Well, he is going to be surprised when he moves into sheol and finds out who all is there. It will be quite a company of people who did not believe that there was an afterlife or a judgment to come. They will all be on the same par. This is total integration! The spirits of all those who have rejected the Lord Jesus will be there—not because they are sinners but because they have rejected Christ as their Savior. It is the sin of *rejecting Christ* that will take them to sheol and finally to the Great White Throne of judgment and the lake of fire. The Lord

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<sup>32</sup> Chuck Missler, Notes on Ezekiel, khouse.org

Jesus made this clear when He said, “Of sin, because they believe not on me” (John 16:9). How terrible it is not to trust Christ as your Savior.

This passage of Scripture opens up a new area altogether. Someone has called this the “Dante’s Inferno of the Bible.” And it is like that. The lost do go to a definite *place*. The Lord Jesus called it a place of torment and a place where the lost wait for judgment. Some people say, “Oh, I am going to appear before God all right, but I will get things straightened out there because I have been a pretty good fellow.” But when they stand in the presence of the One who was crucified for them, they are going to find out that their puny works did not amount to much. They will discover that they have a fallen nature with no capacity for God, and no interest in Him at all. Where else could God put them? Do you think He could take anyone to heaven with Him who is in rebellion against Him? My friend, this is a very important passage of Scripture.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> McGee, J. V. (1997). *Thru the Bible commentary* (electronic ed.) (Eze 31:18). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.