

Egypt

(24) Ezekiel 29:1–32:32

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Ezekiel 29 begins a four-chapter series of prophecies against Egypt. This was necessary because even though Egypt held Israel in slavery for 400 years, Israel also had an impulse to look to Egypt in times of crisis that predated their years of slavery, going all the way back to Abraham's earliest days in Canaan (Genesis 12:10-20). Isaiah warned God's people, Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help (Isaiah 31:1). Even in Jeremiah's and Ezekiel's days, they still looked to Egypt for help instead of trusting God and His plan.

Ezekiel 29:1-16 – Proclamation Against Egypt

In the tenth year, in the tenth month, on the twelfth day of the month, the word of the Lord came to me, saying, ²“Son of man, set your face against Pharaoh king of Egypt, and prophesy against him, and against all Egypt. ³Speak, 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.’ ⁴But 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. ⁵I 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.

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. ⁷When 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.”

⁸‘Therefore thus says the Lord God: “Surely I will bring a sword upon you and cut off from you man and beast. ⁹And the land of Egypt shall become desolate and waste; then they will know that I am the Lord, because he said, ‘The River is mine, and I have made it.’ ¹⁰Indeed, therefore, I am against you and against your rivers, and I will make the land of Egypt utterly waste and desolate, from Migdol to Syene, as far as the border of Ethiopia.

¹¹Neither foot of man shall pass through it nor foot of beast pass through it, and it shall be uninhabited forty years.

¹²I will make the land of Egypt desolate in the midst of the countries that are desolate; and among the cities that

are laid waste, her cities shall be desolate forty years; and I will scatter the Egyptians among the nations and disperse them throughout the countries.”

¹³‘Yet, thus says the Lord God: “At the end of forty years I will gather the Egyptians from the peoples among whom they were scattered. ¹⁴I will bring back the captives of Egypt and cause them to return to the land of Pathros, to the land of their origin, and there they shall be a lowly kingdom. ¹⁵It shall be the lowliest of kingdoms; it shall never again exalt itself above the nations, for I will diminish them so that they will not rule over the nations anymore. ¹⁶No longer shall it be the confidence of the house of Israel, but will remind them of their iniquity when they turned to follow them. Then they shall know that I am the Lord God.” ’ ’

In the tenth year: This prophecy regarding Egypt came to Jeremiah before the fall of Jerusalem. At this time there were still some in Judah and Jerusalem who hoped that Egypt would rescue them from the powerful Babylonians.

v2-3 – Who is this prophecy against?

Ostensibly against Pharaoh, the king of Egypt. But as we saw in the previous chapter, there is a spiritual power behind the king who is the real enemy described here as the “monster who lies in the midst of his rivers.”

What does this monster who guides the Pharaoh think of the Nile River?

That the river is owned by him and that he even made it. Only Satan has the temerity to believe such a thing.

v4-5 – Who is really in control of what happens?

God is who put hooks in the jaws of the monster to cause him to suffer destruction.

What would cause the fish of the river to “fall in the open field” and become “as food to the beasts of the field and to the birds of the heavens”?

The fish of the Nile River figuratively stick to the monster's scales, and all are hurled from the river onto its banks to rot and dry in the sun. The Nile would flood.

What causes the Nile to flood?

The Nile, which annually flooded with clocklike predictability, has ceased its flooding since the construction of the High Dam at Aswan in 1970. Total destruction of this dam is the only way it could flood as catastrophically as described in Scripture.

v6-7 – Why would God cause such a calamity to happen to Egypt?

Then all the inhabitants of Egypt shall know that I am the Lord: The coming judgment upon Egypt would show them that the God of Israel, did in fact rule.

When they leaned on you, you broke: Judah hoped to rely on Egypt's power to help them against the Babylonian Empire, but they were like **a staff of reed to the house of Israel**. Egypt was a target of God's judgment and could never help Judah who was also appointed for God's judgment.

- This is a reference to the half-hearted response of Pharaoh Hophra to Zedekiah's appeal for help (cf. Jeremiah 37:7). It produced only a temporary lull in the siege of Jerusalem and it was little more than token help on the Egyptians' part.
- The Egyptians had a reputation for making promises and not keeping them (2 Kings 18:20–21; Isaiah 36:6).
- It was the sin of the Jews to trust Egypt; it was Egypt's great sin to falsify promise with the Jews, and for this God now punished Egypt.

v8-9 – What would God do to punish Egypt?

I will bring a sword upon you and cut off from you man and beast: God's judgment would come through the **sword** of warfare wielded by the Babylonians, and it would lay waste to both **man and beast**. This judgment would come because of Egypt's pride, especially as it focused on the Nile (*the River is mine*).

v9-11 – How severe would be the judgment of God?

Egypt would become utterly desolate and waste to the point where neither man nor beast would go through it for 40 years.

Has Egypt ever had such devastation?

No such 40-year period is known in Egyptian history. Thus, some claim a literal fulfillment of the prophecy was not intended and that it is to be taken as hyperbole. But the context does not indicate a shift from the literal to the figurative so it has to be yet future.

What is this “Migdol to Syene”?

“Migdol” is a Hebrew word meaning “tower” so this is referring to a “tower of Syene.”

- According to Gary Stearman of Prophecy Watchers, this refers to the Lotus Tower at the Aswan High Dam in southern Egypt... it is a 230-foot tower, called the “Lotus Tower,” because it is topped by the five petals of the lotus blossom. The tower was designed as a token of Arab-Russian friendship, its five petals perhaps signifying the five pillars of the Islamic faith.
- From several sources, it is quite easy to confirm that the biblical Syene is really Aswan. One of these is the Keil & Delitzsch Commentary on the Old Testament, first published in 1866. It affirms the connection, from the Greek Septuagint: “[Suhnh], Syene, in the inscriptions according to Brugsch [was] the most southerly border town of Egypt in the direction of Cush, i.e. Ethiopia, on the eastern bank of the Nile, some ruins of which are still to be seen in the modern Assuan (Aswan) ...” (Vol. 9, Ezekiel 29-48, p. 8).

What do we know about the Aswan High dam?

The Aswan High dam was a Russian hydroelectric project that is amazing in its scope. It is huge, measuring 360 feet in height, 10,200 feet (almost two miles!) long and 3,200 feet wide at the base. Backed up behind it is the vast Lake Nasser, and the waters of the Nile that pool all the way into Ethiopia. The dam's dimensions are so massive that it is considered indestructible. Saboteurs using ordinary explosives wouldn't make a dent. However, experts have said that one or two well-placed nuclear bombs could blow it wide open.

What could account for people having to be dispersed among other countries for 40 years?

If nuclear weapons are used to cause this catastrophe, the floodwaters would cover all Egypt with nuclear waste. This would account for the virtual abandonment of the country for the forty-year period mentioned by Ezekiel.

Why might the Aswan dam be destroyed?

If Egypt threatened Israel, this would be a quick way for Israel to deal with this threat. This would be especially important if they are attacked on multiple fronts like they have in the past.

What is the political situation in Egypt that could lead to their piling on with other nations against Israel?

Since the “Arab Spring” Egypt has had a government that is hanging on by a string. The Muslim Brotherhood is a radical transnational Sunni Islamist terrorist organization founded in Egypt. If they were to take control in Egypt, they would definitely join any attack on Israel.

v12-13 – What would become of the people of Egypt when the land of Egypt is desolate for 40 years?

They are scattered and dispersed among other nations but God will return them to their land after the 40 years is up.

v14-15 – What kind of kingdom will Egypt be when they return to their land after the 40 years of exile?

They will be the “lowliest of kingdoms,” not ruling over other nations any more. They will be thoroughly humbled.

Ezekiel 29:17-21 – Babylonia Will Plunder Egypt

Summary: Nebuchadnezzar will plunder Egypt, probably a gift from God after their long siege of Tyre where they were hardly compensated... The Tyrians, finding it at last impossible to defend their city, put all their wealth aboard their vessels, sailed out of the port, and escaped for Carthage.

When do think the 40-year destruction could happen?

In the time frame of the day of the Lord...

Ezekiel 30:1-8 – Egypt and Her Allies Will Fall

The word of the Lord came to me again, saying, ² *“Son of man, prophesy and say, ‘Thus says the Lord God: ‘Wail, ‘Woe to the day!’³ For the day is near, Even the day of the Lord is near; It will be a day of clouds, the time of the Gentiles. ⁴The sword shall come upon Egypt, And great anguish shall be in Ethiopia, When the slain fall in Egypt, And they take away her wealth, And her foundations are broken down. ⁵‘Ethiopia, Libya, Lydia, all the mingled people, Chub, and the men of the lands who are allied, shall fall with them by the sword.’⁶ ‘Thus says the Lord: “Those who uphold Egypt shall fall, And the pride of her power shall come down. From Migdol to Syene Those within her shall fall by the sword,” Says the Lord God. ⁷“They shall be desolate in the midst of the desolate countries, And her cities shall be in the midst of the cities that are laid waste. ⁸Then they will know that I am the Lord, When I have set a fire in Egypt And all her helpers are destroyed.*

What is the Day of the Lord?

The phrase “day of the Lord” usually identifies events that take place at the revealing of the Son of God to the world. One key to understanding this phrase is to note that it always identifies a time when God personally intervenes in history to accomplish some specific aspect of His plan.

- Most people associate the day of the Lord with a period of time or a special day that will occur when God’s will and purpose for His world and for mankind will be fulfilled.

- Besides being a time of judgment, it will also be a time of salvation as God will deliver the remnant of Israel, fulfilling His promise that *“all of Israel will be saved”* (Romans 11:26), forgiving their sins and restoring His chosen people to the land He promised to Abraham (Isaiah 10:27; Jeremiah 30:19-31, 40; Micah 4; Zechariah 13).
- The final outcome of the day of the Lord will be that *“the arrogance of man will be brought low and the pride of men humbled; the Lord alone will be exalted in that day”* (Isaiah 2:17).
- The ultimate or final fulfillment of the prophecies concerning the day of the Lord will come at the end of history when God, with wondrous power, will punish evil and fulfill all His promises.

What other nations are judged along with Egypt?

Ethiopia, Libya, Lydia: The judgment of God through war would not only come against Egypt, but against her whole sphere of influence. All those *allied* with her *shall fall with them by the sword.*

Who are the mingled people?

The reference is so general that a positive identification cannot be made. They have been understood to be the foreigners who served in the Egyptian army as mercenary soldiers. Extrabiblical sources confirm the fact that Egypt made great use of hired soldiers from various nationalities.

So, what is a reasonable scenario for when the 40-year destruction of Egypt could happen?

Psalm 83:5-6 – *With one mind they plot together; they form an alliance against you... the Hagarites [Egyptians].”*

Psalm 83 is a prayer calling down judgment and justice upon Israel’s neighboring enemies. In Psalm 83, all the nations that are listed have modern equivalents to the nations that today surround Israel: Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Gaza and Egypt. Israel has never fully subjugated those lands as the prayer calls for, especially since they became a nation once again in 1948.

Why do many think the war represented by Psalm 83 happens prior to the Gog-Magog war of Ezekiel 38?

The nations immediately adjacent to Israel are not mentioned in Ezekiel 38 and the motivation of the perpetrators is different...

Ezekiel 38:11-12 – *You will say, ‘I will go up against a land of unwalled villages; I will go to a peaceful people, who dwell safely, all of them dwelling without walls, and having neither bars nor gates’— to take plunder and to take booty, to stretch out your hand against the waste places that are again inhabited, and against a*

people gathered from the nations, who have acquired livestock and goods, who dwell in the midst of the land.

Contrast that with the motive of Israel's enemies today...

Psalm 83:4 – They have said, “Come, and let us cut them off from being a nation, That the name of Israel may be remembered no more.”

Also, in order for Israel to be at peace (the conditions of Ezekiel 38), it would appear Israel would have to deal with their hostile neighbors, possibly subjugating them, for the requirements of Ezekiel 38-39 to fall into place.

Will the church still be around when Egypt becomes desolate for 40 years?

That is not clear one way or the other. There is nothing to say that the 40 years of desolation could not extend into the Millennial Kingdom though we certainly expect that with the Lord in the neighborhood a lot of miraculous pollution clean-up would occur.

What do we know of Egypt during the Millennial Kingdom?

Isaiah 19:19-20 – 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. 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.

It looks like God restores them and they become one of the Gentile nations who honor Him and recognize Jesus as their Savior (see also Jeremiah 12:14-17).

Ezekiel 31:1-18 – Egypt Cut Down Like a Great Tree

Summary: Egypt should have learned from Assyria who suffered due to their pride by the Babylonian army before them. Assyria was stronger than Egypt so if Babylon could conquer them, Egypt did not have a chance to escape the Babylonians.

Why don't people learn from history?

Ecclesiastes 1:9 – What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun.

- People always think they are smarter than all who have gone before them (fruit of the evolutionary mindset)
- People rationalize that, “the victors write the history” which results in the perception that all history is skewed to one side's take on what happened and thus it can be dismissed.

Ezekiel 32:1-32 – Egypt of that time destined for hell

Summary: This last of the seven prophecies against Egypt happened in the **twelfth year**, the year after the fall of Jerusalem. Egypt's destiny was to go to *sheol*, to the **pit**, the **depths of the earth**. Egypt's destiny was to share the disgrace and shame of other judged nations.

- Ezekiel ironically mentioned some small comfort that would come to Pharaoh on the day he entered hell. The **comfort** would come from knowing he was not the only one to suffer such shame and disgrace in judgment.

Why did God create hell?

Hell is a place of suffering originally prepared by God for the devil and his angels (Matthew 18:9; 25:41).

- The words Hades (Greek) and Sheol (Hebrew) are sometimes used for hell. However, Hades/Sheol is simply the place where the spirits of all people go when they die (see Genesis 37:35). In Luke 16:19–31 Hades is “compartmentalized” into a place of comfort and a place of torment.
- There are other words associated with hell in the Bible such as Gehenna and lake of fire. It is clear that there is an actual place where the spirits of the unsaved go for eternity (Revelation 9:1; 20:15; Matthew 23:33).
- Jesus said that hell was “prepared” for Satan and the demons (Matthew 25:41). It is a just punishment for the wicked. Hell, or the lake of fire, will also be the destination for those who reject Christ (2 Pet 2:4–9). The good news is that people can avoid hell. God, in His mercy and love, has made a way of salvation for everyone who trusts in God's Son, Jesus Christ (John 3:16, 36; 5:24).

What applications do we see for our discussion of the Ezekiel prophecies of Egypt?

- God cares about the Gentiles and especially how they treat His people Israel.
- God's prophets reveal amazing things that is hard to believe yet are sure to happen because even more amazing things have happened in the past.
- The Day of the Lord is coming so the best policy is to be ready for Him to return.
- Pride comes before a fall and God will humble individuals as well as nations to bring us to a point where we rightly recognize who is our Creator-God.
- Hell is a reality for the enemies of God. Eternal blessings are in store for those who embrace God's provision.