

EZEKIEL

Chapter 31

Pharaoh to Be Slain

In the eleventh year, in the third month, on the first day of the month, the word of the LORD came to me: 2 “Son of man, say to Pharaoh king of Egypt and to his multitude: “Whom are you like in your greatness? 3 Behold, Assyria was a cedar in Lebanon, with beautiful branches and forest shade, and of towering height, its top among the clouds. 4 The waters nourished it; the deep made it grow tall, making its rivers flow around the place of its planting, sending forth its streams to all the trees of the field. 5 So it towered high above all the trees of the field; its boughs grew large and its branches long from abundant water in its shoots. 6 All the birds of the heavens made their nests in its boughs; under its branches all the beasts of the field gave birth to their young, and under its shadow lived all great nations. 7 It was beautiful in its greatness, in the length of its branches; for its roots went down to abundant waters. 8 The cedars in the garden of God could not rival it, nor the fir trees equal its boughs; neither were the plane trees like its branches; no tree in the garden of God was its equal in beauty. 9 I made it beautiful in the mass of its branches, and all the trees of Eden envied it, that were in the garden of God. 10 “Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Because it towered high and set its top among the clouds, and its heart was proud of its height, 11 I will give it into the hand of a mighty one of the nations. He shall surely deal with it as its wickedness deserves. I have cast it out. 12 Foreigners, the most ruthless of nations, have cut it down and left it. On the mountains and in all the valleys its branches have fallen, and its boughs have been broken in all the ravines of the land, and all the peoples of the earth have gone away from its shadow and left it. 13 On its fallen trunk dwell all the birds of the heavens, and on its branches are all the beasts of the field. 14 All this is in order that no trees by the waters may grow to towering height or set their tops among the clouds, and that no trees that drink water may reach up to them in height. For they are all given over to death, to the world below, among the children of man, with those who go down to the pit. 15 “Thus says the Lord GOD: On the day the cedar went down to Sheol I caused mourning; I closed the deep over it, and restrained its rivers, and many waters were stopped. I clothed Lebanon in gloom for it, and all the trees of the field fainted because of it. 16 I made the nations quake at the sound of its fall, when I cast it down to Sheol with those who go down to the pit. And all the trees of Eden, the choice and best of Lebanon, all that drink water, were comforted in the world below. 17 They also went down to Sheol with it, to those who are slain by the sword; yes, those who were its arm, who lived under its shadow among the nations. 18 “Whom are you thus like in glory and in greatness among the trees of Eden? You shall be brought down with the trees of Eden to the world below. You shall lie among the uncircumcised, with those who are slain by the sword. “This is Pharaoh and all his multitude, declares the Lord GOD.”

Rarely are the boundaries of an oracle indicated so clearly by formal markers that coincide almost exactly with one entire chapter. After the date notice, 31:1–2 opens with the word-event formula, “the Word of Yahweh came to me,” and Yahweh’s address to the prophet as “son of man.” Then 31:18 closes with the divine signatory formula, “says the Lord Yahweh.” After the introductory material, the chapter divides naturally into three parts: (1) a description of a cosmic tree (31:2–9); (2) the destruction of the tree because of its pride (31:10–14); and (3) the descent of the felled tree into Sheol (31:15–18). The second and third parts are set off by the citation formula, “thus says the Lord Yahweh,” at their outset (31:10, 15). In contrast, the recognition formula, “(then) you/they will know that I am Yahweh,” is absent from the chapter. (CC)

31:1 The fifth oracle against Egypt. (CSB)

eleventh year ... third month ... first day. June 21, 587 B.C.; the ninth date in Ezekiel (see 1:2; 8:1; 20:1; 24:1; 26:1; 29:1, 17; 30:20). (CSB)

31:2 *greatness?* Egypt's fall from imperial glory to disgrace and servitude would be like the sudden crashing to earth of a magnificent cedar. So Assyria (cf v 3), only three decades earlier, went down to oblivion from heights of world dominion. Egypt also has attained great height, dwarfing all rivals. The question is whether Assyria's fate will be a warning to Pharaoh that pride goes before destruction (Pr 16:18; cf Ezk 27). (TLSB)

31:3 *behold Assyria.* A great nation that had fallen. In 609 B.C. Pharaoh Neco went to Carchemish to help the Assyrian empire, which was reeling from Babylonian attacks. The effort failed and Assyria passed from history. (CSB)

The Assyrian Empire towered high above the nations like a cedar in Lebanon. But when it stood at the pinnacle of glory, it suddenly disappeared from sight as if it were a tall tree felled in its prime. Egypt, like it in its greatness, will be like it also as it topples into irreversible ruin. (TLSB)

was a cedar. The beginning of another allegory (see Ezekiel's allegorical use of the cedar in ch. 17). (CSB)

Lebanon. Known for its cedars (see vv. 15–18; Jdg 9:15; 1Ki 4:33; 5:6; 2Ki 14:9; Ezr 3:7; Ps 29:5; 92:12; 104:16). (CSB)

31:4 *waters.* The Tigris and Euphrates. (CSB)

31:5–6 Assyria had been a haven or ruler to many lesser nations and city-states. (TLSB)

31:8 *garden of God.* The note of pride is introduced (see v. 10; cf. 28:13). (CSB)

Not even the trees of Eden were the cedar's equal in beauty and stature. (TLSB)

31:9 *I made it beautiful.* Assyria's wonders were due to God's work. He had even granted Nineveh repentance and deliverance through Jonah's preaching. (TLSB)

31:10–14 Because the cedar refused to acknowledge that God had made it beautiful (v 9), but it was proud of its height, He cut it down and left it to decay. (TLSB)

31:10 *its heart was proud.* Personification of a nation as a tree at times gives way to a description of actual aspects of a human being. Thus the cedar is said to have a proud heart and to go down to the netherworld like all mortal men. Cf Ps 90:5–6; 103:14; Is 40:6. (TLSB)

31:11 *mighty one of the nations.* Probably Nabopolassar; or possibly Nebuchadnezzar. (CSB)

Nebuchadnezzar is called the king of "the most ruthless of nations" in 30:11. (TLSB)

its wickedness. Pride (see v. 10; Ge 11:1–8). (CSB)

31:12 *most ruthless.* Babylon. (CSB)

Allies and trade partners fled from troubled Assyria. (TLSB)

31:13 Others exploit Assyria's downfall. (TLSB)

31:15 The cedar's fall from towering strength to helpless impotence is like a cosmic upheaval affecting the deep, its rivers and many waters, Lebanon, and all the trees of the field—the nations without exception. (TLSB)

31:16 *nations quake*. As at Tyre's fall (see 27:35; 28:19). (CSB)

Sheol ... the pit. The fate decreed on the proud tree is as irreversible as it is impossible for those who go down to the pit to return to their former scene of activity. Death cuts down all attainments, whether great or small. (TLSB)

were comforted. Because the mightiest of trees had joined them in the "grave" (Sheol). (CSB)

People who have not become cedars of success will be comforted to know that the most powerful people must end where the weakest do—in the grave. (TLSB)

31:17 *those slain by the sword*. Those who met a premature death. (CSB)

31:18 *you*. The Egyptian pharaoh. (CSB)

you shall. It would happen to Pharaoh as it had happened to Assyria. (CSB)

There will be no exception to this axiom of the Creator's decree. (TLSB)

Ch 31 Ezekiel speaks God's fifth prophecy against Egypt. God compares Egypt to Assyria, a nation that grew in power under God's guidance and whose capital once repented (cf Jnh 3). But proud Assyria turned away from God. All nations over time have collapsed under the weight of their own pride. Consider that God calls Christians to be in the world, yet not of the world (Jn 15:19). Though we honor God by serving our nation well, our ultimate reward is in His mercy and the homeland He has promised in Christ. • Lord God, even today Your Holy Word stands as testimony against prideful nations. May we honor and serve our nation by honoring and serving You. Amen. (TLSB)