EZEKIEL

Chapter 32

*Lament for Pharaoh*

**In the twelfth year, in the twelfth month on the first day, the word of the LORD came to me:  2 “Son of man, take up a lament concerning Pharaoh king of Egypt and say to him: ”‘You are like a lion among the nations; you are like a monster in the seas thrashing about in your streams, churning the water with your feet and muddying the streams. 3 ”‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: ”‘With a great throng of people I will cast my net over you, and they will haul you up in my net. 4 I will throw you on the land and hurl you on the open field. I will let all the birds of the air settle on you and all the beasts of the earth gorge themselves on you. 5 I will spread your flesh on the mountains and fill the valleys with your remains. 6 I will drench the land with your flowing blood all the way to the mountains, and the ravines will be filled with your flesh. 7 When I snuff you out, I will cover the heavens and darken their stars; I will cover the sun with a cloud, and the moon will not give its light. 8 All the shining lights in the heavens I will darken over you; I will bring darkness over your land, declares the Sovereign LORD. 9 I will trouble the hearts of many peoples when I bring about your destruction among the nations, among lands you have not known. among lands you have not known. 10 I will cause many peoples to be appalled at you, and their kings will shudder with horror because of you when I brandish my sword before them. On the day of your downfall each of them will tremble every moment for his life. 11 ”‘For this is what the Sovereign LORD says: ”‘The sword of the king of Babylon will come against you. 12 I will cause your hordes to fall by the swords of mighty men— the most ruthless of all nations. They will shatter the pride of Egypt, and all her hordes will be overthrown. 13 I will destroy all her cattle from beside abundant waters no longer to be stirred by the foot of man or muddied by the hoofs of cattle. 14 Then I will let her waters settle and make her streams flow like oil, declares the Sovereign LORD. 15 When I make Egypt desolate and strip the land of everything in it, when I strike down all who live there, then they will know that I am the LORD.’ 16 “This is the lament they will chant for her. The daughters of the nations will chant it; for Egypt and all her hordes they will chant it, declares the Sovereign LORD.” 17 In the twelfth year, on the fifteenth day of the month, the word of the LORD came to me:  18 “Son of man, wail for the hordes of Egypt and consign to the earth below both her and the daughters of mighty nations, with those who go down to the pit.  19 Say to them, ‘Are you more favored than others? Go down and be laid among the uncircumcised.’  20 They will fall among those killed by the sword. The sword is drawn; let her be dragged off with all her hordes.  21 From within the grave the mighty leaders will say of Egypt and her allies, ‘They have come down and they lie with the uncircumcised, with those killed by the sword.’ 22 “Assyria is there with her whole army; she is surrounded by the graves of all her slain, all who have fallen by the sword.  23 Their graves are in the depths of the pit and her army lies around her grave. All who had spread terror in the land of the living are slain, fallen by the sword. 24 “Elam is there, with all her hordes around her grave. All of them are slain, fallen by the sword. All who had spread terror in the land of the living went down uncircumcised to the earth below. They bear their shame with those who go down to the pit.  25 A bed is made for her among the slain, with all her hordes around her grave. All of them are uncircumcised, killed by the sword. Because their terror had spread in the land of the living, they bear their shame with those who go down to the pit; they are laid among the slain. 26 “Meshech and Tubal are there, with all their hordes around their graves. All of them are uncircumcised, killed by the sword because they spread their terror in the land of the living.  27 Do they not lie with the other uncircumcised warriors who have fallen, who went down to the grave with their weapons of war, whose swords were placed under their heads? The punishment for their sins rested on their bones, though the terror of these warriors had stalked through the land of the living. 28 “You too, O Pharaoh, will be broken and will lie among the uncircumcised, with those killed by the sword. 29 “Edom is there, her kings and all her princes; despite their power, they are laid with those killed by the sword. They lie with the uncircumcised, with those who go down to the pit. 30 “All the princes of the north and all the Sidonians are there; they went down with the slain in disgrace despite the terror caused by their power. They lie uncircumcised with those killed by the sword and bear their shame with those who go down to the pit. 31 “Pharaoh—he and all his army—will see them and he will be consoled for all his hordes that were killed by the sword, declares the Sovereign LORD.  32 Although I had him spread terror in the land of the living, Pharaoh and all his hordes will be laid among the uncircumcised, with those killed by the sword, declares the Sovereign LORD.”**

**32:1** The sixth oracle against Egypt (see note on 29:1). (CSB)

*twelfth year … twelfth month … first day.* Mar. 3, 585 b.c.; the tenth date in Ezekiel (see 1:2; 8:1; 20:1; 24:1; 26:1; 29:1, 17; 30:20; 31:1). If the Septuagint and Syriac are followed (“eleventh year”), then the chronological order of the Egypt oracles is preserved (and the date would be Mar. 13, 586). Cf. 29:1; 30:20; 31:1; see v. 17 and note. (CSB)

The boundaries of the first oracle are clearly indicated by the date and the word-event formula (“the Word of Yahweh came to me”) in 32:1 and the sort of colophonic conclusion and the signatory formula (“says the Lord Yahweh”) in 32:16. The intervening material, however, is fragmented in various ways that defy easy classification. The great variety is almost irresistible bait for critical speculations about how the chapter took shape. About the only unanimity is the recognition of גּוֹיִם (“nations”) as a keyword that may hold the disparate material together. (CC)

**32:2** *lament.* See note on 19:1. (CSB)

*lion among the nations.* A figure for royalty and grandeur (see 19:1–9). (CSB)

That a pharaoh would compare himself with a “lion” would almost have been expected in Egypt, and to a lesser extent throughout much of the ancient world. It was not necessarily a direct claim to divinity, but not far removed from it. Often it was connected with solar symbolism, specifically Ra, the Egyptian sun god. Both the destructive potential of the sun as well as war was represented by the lion-headed Sekhmet, the bloodthirsty wife of Ptah, a god of wisdom. Semitic syncretism is evident in a plaque of Qudshu (the “holy one”!), a goddess of war and fertility, standing naked astride a lion. It is worth noting that in the Scriptures, the self-revelation of the one true God (a totally non-mythological context), Yahweh executing judgment is often metaphorically compared to a ravening lion: Is 31:4; 38:13; Hos 5:14; 11:10–11; 13:7; and Amos 3:8. Moreover, Jesus, the only Savior from judgment, is portrayed as the conquering “lion from the tribe of Judah.” (CC)

*monster.* See 29:3 and note. (CSB)

In Yahweh’s eyes, the pharaoh’s claims are comic. Instead of anything comparable to the “king of beasts,” he is best compared to a defeated sea monster, or better, to a crocodile, confined to his narrow channels. By using the phrase “like a monster in the seas” (כַּתַּנִּ֣ים בַּיַּמִּ֔ים, 32:2), Ezekiel does apparently briefly introduce another exmythological motif, but he does not develop it. The figures and names often fuse in mythology, but Is 51:9–10 may be instructive, where in a single passage Isaiah links Yamm, Tannin, Tehom, and Rahab, using Yahweh’s exodus victory through the Red Sea as a type or prophecy of the defeat of Babylon (cf. 1 Cor 10:1–4). The monster under the label “Rahab” (“arrogance”?) is applied to Egypt also in Is 30:7 and Ps 87:4, but as a foe who is anything but a threat to God. (CC)

*seas … streams.* Canals of the Nile (see note on 29:3). (CSB)

Here Yahweh portrays Pharaoh by means of a more earthly simile, the rather repugnant one of a crocodile, and a rather helpless one at that. As it thrashes about, perhaps making futile attempts to escape its confines, all it succeeds in doing is polluting what God intends as the life-giving streams of the nations. And for this, it will pay dearly, as elaborated in the rest of the oracle. (CC)

**32:3** *cast my net.* Earlier it was Zedekiah over whom God’s net was thrown (see 12:13; 17:20; 19:8). (CSB)

The imagery of a net to capture enemies is very common in the ancient Near East, also in treaty curses. Even Yahweh is pictured as hunting wicked men with nets in Hos 7:12; Ezek 12:13; and Lam 1:13. Here it yields a vivid picture of Yahweh mustering many nations to effect a “final judgment” on a would-be rival. Thus figurative and non-figurative language are used side by side, a common feature in Ezekiel. (CC)

**32:4** *I will throw.* God’s actions here are very similar to those described in 29:3–5. (CSB)

The verse is largely a reworking of 29:5. To the “hauling up” of 32:3, we now have the contrast of “hurling down.” Before the two complementary activities of Yahweh, the monster is helpless. (CC)

**32:5** SPREAD YOUR FLESH – The language here is reminiscent of that describing the felling of the tree in 31:12. If the hapax רָמוּת (translated “carcass”) is derived from רוּם “be high,” there may be overtones of the sin of haughtiness, which was also given as the reason for Pharaoh, as the world-tree, being cast into the mountains and ravines in 31:10–12. The general similarity of the two passages would emphasize that the subject here is no ordinary beast, but a “world beast” of cosmic dimensions (cf. the dragon in Revelation 12 and the beast he conjures out of the sea in Revelation 13). (CC)

**32:6** DRENCH THE LAND – he verse bristles with difficulties, but the general gist is clear: Ezekiel paints a grotesque, almost revolting picture of Yahweh drenching the entire land with the remains of the monster, his blood and other body fluids and parts. It would be an ignominious end for a ruler who fancied himself “a young lion of the nations” (32:2), and no part of his own nation would remain unaffected by his slaughter. (CC)

**32:7-8** The language becomes more eschatological, even apocalyptic in these verses, and as is to be expected in such contexts, is loaded with imagery. That Pharaoh is being regarded as one of the brightest stars in the sky is supported by the fact that 32:7 coincides closely with Is 13:10, and also by Is 14:12, where the king of Babylon is compared to the morning star. Like Ezekiel 28, these passages relate the downfalls of these evil rulers to the protological fall of Satan in paradise (see the commentary on Ezekiel 28). (CC)

The verb כָּבָה, “snuff out,” when used literally, refers to the extinguishing of a fire (e.g., Lev 6:5–12-13, the altar fire, and 1 Sam 3:3, the lamp at the tabernacle in Shiloh), but figuratively of a life, especially of a leader (of royalty in 2 Sam 21:17). Death is also intimated by darkness, or even by the verb כָסָה, “cover,” used of donning the black of mourning (Ezek 31:15) or even of burial (Num 16:33; Ps 106:17). Compare Is 50:2–3, where Yahweh redeems by drying up the seas (thus defeating the sea serpent in Is 27:1) and clothing the heavens with garments of mourning. (CC)

In typological fashion, the language points both backwards and forward. Especially in 32:8b one cannot but recall the penultimate plague on Egypt, the darkness over the whole land (Ex 10:21–23). And the eschatological import, already broached in passing in Ezek 30:3, is developed more fully in the OT in Joel 2:10 and 3:15. The overthrow of the world-power presented by Pharaoh is to be understood as “an omen and prelude of the overthrow of every ungodly world-power on the day of the last judgment,” when, after the return of Jesus Christ, “the present heaven and the present earth will perish in the judgment-fire.” (CC)

Finally, it should be noted that Ezekiel has reversed the usual sequence of the heavenly bodies (e.g., the stars first instead of last) found in Gen 1:16–18 and in parallels such as Jer 31:35 and Ps 136:7–9. This may be only a literary flourish without exegetical significance. Possibly, however, the thought runs along the lines of Jeremiah’s in 4:23–28, as the ordered cosmos gradually reverts to a state of chaos (“without form and void,” Jer 4:23, as in Gen 1:2). (CC)

**32:7** *I will cover the heavens.* The first of seven clauses threatening the darkness associated with the day of the Lord (see Joel 2:2, 10, 31; 3:15; Am 5:18–20; Zep 1:15). (CSB)

**32:9** *trouble the hearts.* This and the next verse reflect the fear brought about whenever great world powers fall, reminding lesser nations that they are even more vulnerable. Cf. similar feelings aroused by Tyre’s fall (26:16–18; 27:35; 28:19). (CSB)

**32:10** *my sword.* See note on 21:3. (CSB)

The verse vividly describes the international effect of Pharaoh’s defeat. But the eschatological overtones have not been abandoned entirely. The horrors of the end times also appear in similar NT predictions of judgment, for example, Mt 24:20–21. (CC)

**32:11** The use of the citation formula, “thus says the Lord Yahweh,” indicates a transition in the oracle. The figurative language of the preceding verses is dropped and the message is summarized in literal terms: the imminent Babylonian devastation of Egypt. Ezekiel’s “sword” motif is featured especially in 32:11–12, emphasizing how Yahweh will carry out his preceding threat to “brandish” his sword (32:10). As in 21:19), the sword almost assumes a life and power of its own. In the wider context, it is not even the king of Babylon’s sword, as such, which is in mind, but Yahweh’s, and he merely uses the king as his agent. (CC)

*king of Babylon.* Nebuchadnezzar (cf. 21:19). (CSB)

**32:12** *most ruthless of all nations.* Babylon (see note on 30:11). (CSB)

The king does not come alone, but with all his ruthless allies. “The most ruthless of nations” was used of Babylon and company already in 28:7; 30:11; and 31:12. The opposition here is termed “the pride of Egypt,” probably not referring so much to that of which Egypt is proud, but to whatever in Egypt exalts itself—perhaps Egypt itself as a challenger of Yahweh. Powerful language is used to describe the result for Egypt. (CC)

**32:13-14** As already the Targum and the Vulgate discerned, we have in these verses another of those messianic (in the broad sense) passages that Yahweh slips in at the most unexpected places, reminding us that even God’s most severe judgments are subservient to his ultimate salvific intent. Pharaoh, the embodiment of “the kingdoms of this world” under judgment here, has been challenging and obscuring the clear streams of God’s grace and promise, and his blessings cannot include “Egypt” until its fallen, natural will to grasp power is destroyed. Rivers that “flow like oil” are not merely rivers that flow smoothly and viscously, but rivers that contain oil instead of water (cf. Job 29:6). Throughout the Old and New Testaments, and continuing in Christian usage and symbolism, the chrism (cf. “Christ”!) or unction of oil is used to describe the life-giving power of the Spirit and the blessings of Christ’s work, which the Spirit brings through God’s Word and Sacraments, Baptism and also the Lord’s Supper. Catholic and Orthodox churches apply chrism together with Holy Baptism. (CC)

If Christological exegesis of the OT means anything, it means “reading *out of*” (not “into”!) texts like these all the specific fullness that Scripture interpreting Scripture will entail. In the OT, the beatific significance of oil occurs also in Gen 27:28 (Isaac’s blessing of Jacob) and in Deut 32:13. Keil quotes even Ewald, one of the nineteenth-century pioneers of the rise of the historical-critical method, as summarizing the meaning of this weighty, but easily overlooked verse: “The Messianic times will then for the first time dawn on Egypt, when the waters no more become devastating and turbid, that is to say, through the true knowledge to which the chastisement leads.” (CC)

**32:14** *streams flow like oil.* Their surface undisturbed by any form of life. This is the only place in the Bible where this eerie metaphor is used to describe desolation. (CSB)

**32:15** This summary of a summary expresses in three more or less synonymous clauses and in a more formulaic way (the recognition formula, “they will know that I am Yahweh”) what the previous verse had asserted more poetically, that Yahweh’s purpose in judgment is to move people to repentance; but if they will not repent, at least they will recognize his lordship (cf. Phil 2:10–11). (CC)

Greenberg plausibly understands the threats of this chapter as an adaptation of Lev 26:34–35, where the future desolation of the land of Israel is attributed to its failure to observe the sabbatical years God commanded: “With the desolation of the land of Israel God’s dominion is affirmed through enforced sabbaticals; with the desolation of Egypt it is affirmed through enforced limpidity of the Nile.” (CC)

**32:16** *daughters of the nations.* A world chorus of professional wailers (see Jer 9:17–18). (CSB)

Theologically, this postscript merely predicts that the judgment oracle just concluded will be keened, or chanted as a dirge, beyond all national frontiers and thus will proclaim God’s victory over any and all that presumes to vaunt itself over him. On Easter (and every Sunday), the Christian church proclaims that that decisive victory has already been won and a realized eschatology is celebrated proleptically even before the lingering forces of Satan mount another futile challenge. (CC)

**32:17** The seventh and last oracle against Egypt (see note on 29:1). (CSB)

*twelfth year … fifteenth day.* No month is given (as in 26:1; 40:1). The whole year dates from Apr. 13, 586, to Apr. 1, 585 b.c. The Septuagint suggests the first month, the 15th day of which would be Apr. 27, 586. (CSB)

**32:18** *earth below.* Same as “grave” (Sheol) in 31:15. (CSB)

The last in the collection of Ezekiel’s Gentile oracles is clearly a sequel to and conclusion of the preceding one. It is focused almost completely on Egypt’s descent into the “pit,” or Sheol, and is, in fact, alongside Isaiah 14, one of the OT’s most detailed depictions of the nether region. It begins with another command to “lament/wail,” but in the light of what follows, that word could almost be translated as “taunt” (see the textual note). The content, as such, is not specified, but another command immediately follows. The charge involves the verb יָרַד, “go down, descend,” used prominently in this oracle as in previous oracles against Tyre (26:11, 16, 20) and Egypt (31:12–18), which is not surprising, considering the subject matter. More surprising is its inflection as a Hiphil imperative with the prophet as the subject: “bid it go down.” This is an excellent example of the power of the prophetic word, which often does not only proclaim or predict, but brings reality to pass. But, of course, it is not the power of the prophet’s word, as such, in some inherent, magical way, but the efficacious Word of Yahweh, which always accomplishes what it says (Is 55:10–11). Christian life and worship depends on this power of God’s Word, as when the pastor pronounces absolution and declares, “As a called and ordained servant of Christ, and by His authority, I therefore forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” Christ’s Words of Institution too are efficacious: Christ is present at his Supper in such a way that communicants receive his very body and blood together with the bread and wine. (CC)

Literally, the prophet is to “make” Egypt “go down” to the underworld, that is to consign it to its posthumous existence there. Nor is he to do it alone, but in concert with the בְנ֨וֹת גּוֹיִ֧ם אַרִּרִ֛ם, “the daughters of majestic nations,” the professional mourning women mentioned in 32:16—and thus an obvious link with that preceding oracle. Sometimes the genitive here is taken as epexegetical, “the daughters who are the nations” that will be mentioned later in the oracle, but that strikes me as unlikely. God is here described as working mediately, not only through “called and ordained” prophets, but through other agents, who have no idea whom they are really serving. All his creatures, and indeed all creation, carries out the purposes of the Creator and Redeemer. (CC)

*daughters of mighty nations.* See note on v. 16. (CSB)

By labeling the nations “majestic,” Yahweh reminds Egypt that many powers as great or greater than it is have met the same destiny and it should not suppose that it will somehow be exempt. At the same time, he extends his taunt of Egypt into a funeral dirge on the fall of all the heathen powers of the world—the ultimate point of all the Gentile oracles. (CC)

**32:19** *uncircumcised.* See note on 28:10. (CSB)

The prophet’s actual speech to Pharaoh begins here, and it fairly drips with mockery and sarcasm. The language is different, but the rhetorical force of the question is similar to earlier challenges to name anyone equal to Egypt in greatness (31:2) and glory (31:18). But here is the gist: who does he think he is, favored somewhat by God as he once had been, that he thinks it will exempt him from the universal visit of God’s “grim reaper”? (CC)

The ignominy is even incomparably greater if he must lie down among the “uncircumcised.” The applicability of such obloquy here is puzzling, as it was in 28:10, where the prince of Tyre was prophesied to “die the death of the uncircumcised.” The problem arises from the fact that the Egyptians (at least priests and kings), like the Edomites and the Sidonians in the following list, practiced circumcision. Evidently, Ezekiel is using conventional and metaphorical language. Perhaps there is simply an assumption that the Egyptians would have found such a thought as revolting as Israelites would, and this may well have been the case, but firm evidence is lacking. It is frequently assumed that Israelite custom excluded the uncircumcised from family graves and that they were consigned to the lowest level of the underworld since they had broken God’s covenant and would be cut off from their kin (Gen 17:14). Orthodox Israelites would, of course, be circumcised, and perhaps a comparable assertion could be made of Egyptians (at least, the upper classes) as well. (CC)

As a priest, Ezekiel would be especially knowledgeable and precise about such matters of the covenant. He may, at God’s bidding, have been homiletically applying Israelite covenantal categories to Egyptians, according to which they would be “uncircumcised” spiritually—excluded from God’s covenant of grace and hence from his redeemed people—even if circumcised in the flesh. In God’s frame of reference, the dishonorability of departing this world as “uncircumcised” also extends to the underworld, and to be buried with the uncircumcised would obviously add insult to injury. In the new covenant, Holy Baptism into Christ’s death and resurrection supercedes circumcision as the seal and guarantee of inheritance of all God’s gracious promises. Thus to express the fate of Pharaoh in NT terms, he is consigned to eternal perdition among the unbaptized, who are unbelievers (cf. Rev 20:15; 21:27). (CC)

**32:20 I**nterpretation of so difficult a text is also difficult. One almost gets an impression of a series of disjointed sentences, each of which must be considered independently. The subject of the initial verb “they will fall” (יִפֹּ֑לוּ) must be the Egyptians. The imperfect (future?) almost sounds like a flashback to the battles preceding their descent into Sheol. Is there a connection with the “uncircumcised” just mentioned? “The uncircumcised” and “those slain by the sword” are placed side by side in 32:21b and perhaps should be here also. Greenberg sees the connection in the fact that fallen corpses were typically stripped by the victors and their naked bodies would make their lack of circumcision evident. Block argues, as he does repeatedly, that “those slain by the sword” does not mean simply casualties of war, but criminals, who after execution were not given an honorable burial, but disposed of otherwise, and in the underworld would also be separated from those who had received proper burials. In this context, he appeals to 32:27 as evidence. Thus while distinguished from the uncircumcised, both groups would be sequestered, and it would be equally disgraceful to have to join them in Sheol. But the evidence for this view is weak. (CC)

**32:21** Egypt’s “helpers” (“allies”) were mentioned already in 30:8, and their association with Pharaoh here is probably essentially synonymous. They are not mentioned in the LXX and Syriac. Their function, if anything specific, seems to be to identify themselves as the “uncircumcised” of the next clause. The import of 32:21b is uncertain. Some read it as a sort of snide aside when Pharaoh arrives (“here come …”). Others construe the entire half verse as simply a parenthetical addition. Pharaoh’s warriors would presumably have been circumcised, and the point could be simply a denigrating assimilation of the Egyptians to those who were physically uncircumcised. Another attractive solution is to take “the leaders of the warriors” as the subject (spoken of here in relative clauses without אֲשֶׁר), “who went down (and) lay uncircumcised, pierced by the sword.” Finally, the terms may be adverbial accusatives: “they have gone down as leaders, uncircumcised.” In any case, the indisputable point is the inevitable doom of Egypt. (CC)

**32:22** Yahweh’s “dishonor roll” (list of dishonored nations) begins here and continues through 32:30. It is scarcely surprising that Assyria heads the list. It had been two decades since Assyria had fallen for the last time at the Battle of Carchemish (605 b.c.), but memories of its preceding centuries of sadistic tyranny were doubtless still very much alive. As will be repeated several times, there appears here the first mention of the common practice of grave complexes with the king’s tomb at the center and those of the royal family and other nobility nearby. Any tourist who has visited the pyramids across the Nile from Cairo can readily visualize the general picture, although the precise burial practices varied from country to country. (CC)

**32:23** This verse adds two details, the first of which is applied only to Assyria. Its graves will be situated in “the deepest part of the pit.” The noun יְרֵכָה describes the remotest, most distant, and/or most inaccessible part of something. (Ezekiel will use it again of the צָפוֹן “north,” in 38:6, 15; 39:2, and of the eschatological temple in 46:19.) The only other place where it is used with בּוֹר, “the pit, hell,” is in Is 14:15, where it is contrasted with remotest parts of the “north” (Is 14:13), there Mount Zaphon (in Greek, Casius, the pagan Canaanite counterpart of Mount Olympus, the home of the gods). There the opposition is specific: the Babylonian king who aspired to be a god in the highest heaven will be cast down to the lowest part of Sheol. That contrast is not articulated here, but the import is very similar. Assyria, which had in the mid-seventh century ruled most of the “civilized” world of the time, including Egypt, had ceased to exist in this world and would never rise again. (CC)

The point is a proverbial one, not far removed from our Lord’s diction “everyone who exalts himself will be humbled” (Lk 14:11; 18:14; see also Lk 10:15, 18). This passage, like Ezek 31:11–14, indicates that the higher an arrogant unbeliever aspires and rises on earth, and the more egregious his sins against God and his fellow humans, the deeper he is consigned in the underworld. This is consistent with other passages that allude to degrees of punishment in hell (e.g., Lk 12:47–48; James 3:1), even as Scripture also speaks of degrees of glory for the redeemed in heaven (e.g., Dan 12:3; Lk 19:16–19). (CC)

Second, there is a charge that we shall hear again in each of the next four verses and in 32:30, namely, that these nations had caused or spread חִתִּית, “terror,” in this world. This is a uniquely Ezekelian expression (also used of Tyre in 26:17). It occurs seven times in this context and perhaps comes as close as anything to giving a reason why the nations targeted are included in Yahweh’s “dishonor roll.” Their reign of terror in the “land of the living” (32:23) is contrasted with their utter impotence in Sheol. Again, the sinful behavior of unbelievers in this life will lead to corresponding punishments in the hereafter. “As a man sows, so shall he reap” (Gal 6:7–8; cf. 2 Cor 9:6) pertains both to the judgment of unbelievers (Hos 8:7) and to the salvation of penitent believers (Hos 10:12; Ps 126:5). (CC)

**32:24-25** Elam remains one of the least known of the major civilizations of the ancient Near East. Its long history, usually considered as beginning around 3200 b.c. and ending (at least politically) with its conquest by Alexander the Great in 331, is punctuated by a recurrence of both military and mercantile contacts with Mesopotamia to its west, apparently one of those constants of ancient world history (consider the modern relations of Iran and Iraq). Elamites (or people occupying the same territory, the southwestern part of the Iranian plateau, today the Iranian province of Khuzestan) developed their own system of ideographic writing about the same time as the Sumerians, but this Proto-Elamite remains undeciphered, although presumably reflecting the same agglutinate tongue (unrelated to any other known language) known from its later history. One of its major cities, and often its capital, was Susa, the setting of the book of Esther, the writer of which was, as archaeology has demonstrated, well acquainted with the city, whether or not he actually lived there. At times, part of the area was even known as Susiana. (CC)

The region makes its first major mark in recorded history around 2200 b.c. with the destruction of the Akkadian Empire (the earliest Semitic one) by the Guti, barbarians from the Zagros Mountains. A few centuries later, Elamites play a role in the fall of Ur III (the third dynasty of Ur, at the end of the Sumerian political influence), and still later, around 1600, with the collapse of the Amorite dynasty of Babylon (Hammurabi is its best-known ruler). Elam reached its brief zenith a couple of centuries later. Much closer to Ezekiel’s day, Elam was constantly dabbling in the interminable conflict between the Assyrians and Babylonians (now mostly Aramean Chaldeans), inevitably provoking Assyrian reprisals, first by Sennacherib (704–681), for aiding the Chaldean guerrilla rebel Merodach-Baladan (2 Ki 20:12 || Is 39:1), and a little later by Ashurbanipal (668–627). In 640, Ashurbanipal finally conquered the country and described (probably in somewhat hyperbolic detail, as was customary) the ferocity with which he wreaked his vengeance on an ancient foe. Some Elamites were even deported to Samaria (Ezra 4:9–10). One cannot point to any single event that caused Yahweh to include Elam in his dishonor roll, but their settlement in northern Israel after it was taken by Assyria would be a major candidate. (CC)

It is beyond our purview to sketch Elam’s history further, but the name does not disappear from the historical record for a long time. While others were preoccupied with the Mesopotamian conflict, the Medes and the Persians, originally from the plateau, gradually pushed the indigenous Elamites toward the low country. At least by the time Cyrus (559–530) conquered Babylon in 539 (cf. Is 21:2), Elam had become a province of the Achaemenid Empire, which inherited many characteristics of Elamite culture. Darius (521–486) restored Susa to its ancient glory, and the city’s association with Elam is reflected in the Bible (Dan 8:2; Ezra 4:9). The city continued to exist after the Hellenistic and even later the Islamic invasions, but by the fourteenth century a.d., the ancient empire finally fell into oblivion. (CC)

The Bible does not flesh out major details of Elamite history, but what is known from secular sources does explain why it is mentioned as often as it is. In the Table of Nations (Gen 10:22 || 1 Chr 1:17), Elam appears as a son of Shem, alongside Asshur (Assyria), Arpochshad (?), Lud (Lydia), and Aram. The most famous Elamite in the OT is “Chedorlaomer, king of Elam” (Gen 14:1, 9), among those four kings who captured Lot, who was rescued by Abraham, who was subsequently feted by Melchizedek. The name Chedorlaomer is unquestionably Elamite, but no satisfactory identification is known from Elamite history. Elam is mentioned several times by the prophets. Is 22:6 associates Elamites with archery, chariotry, and cavalry. Jeremiah (49:34–39) is the only prophet to devote an entire Gentile oracle against Elam. Is 11:11 speaks of an Israelite diaspora in Elam, and after Cyrus’ edict (538), Israelites are mentioned as returning from Elam (Ezra 2:7, 31; 8:7). Nor are we surprised to find Elamites among the pilgrims in Jerusalem on Pentecost (Acts 2:9). (CC)

What Ezekiel says of Elam is what he has already said of Egypt, and almost in the same words. As Boadt notes: “The constant repetition of the same description for each nation … has a calculated tolling effect that enhances the nature of a lament.” Ezek 32:25 virtually duplicates 32:24, except for the omission of the opening “Elam is there” and the middle clause (“who … underworld”) and a few other minor changes. (CC)

**32:24** *Elam.* A country east of Assyria; in present-day Iran. (CSB)

**32:26** *Meshech and Tubal.* Peoples and territories in Asia Minor. (CSB)

Meshech and Tubal, two Anatolian nations, are usually considered semi-separately. In 27:13 both names had appeared, in reverse order. They apparently could act in concert, but also were often ravaged by internecine (fratricidal? see Gen 10:2 || 1 Chr 1:5) warfare. Not too much is known of the details of their history. They seem to have skirmishes repeatedly both with the barbarian Cimmerians (Gomer; see the textual note) from southern Russia and with Assyria. We have no knowledge of direct contacts with Israel, but it is usually supposed that their contacts with Assyria underlie their inclusion in Ezekiel’s list here. Later they were incorporated into the Persian Empire, but appear to lose their ethnic or cultural identity after that. Ezek 27:13 mentioned them as traders with Tyre in both human slaves and in bronze. In chapters 38–39, they will reappear as included in Gog’s massive (eschatological) invasion of Israel’s restored land. (CC)

**32:27** My decision not to treat לֹא as a negative, but as having the same meaning as הֲלֹא (introducing a rhetorical question: “do they not … ?”) yields an entirely different meaning of the verse than that found in the majority of translations and commentaries. In less stereotyped language than usual, Yahweh simply affirms that Meshech and Tubal find their place in Sheol together with generations of the “uncircumcised” before them. Except for varied language, this is thoroughly in line with what Yahweh has been asserting throughout his list of dishonored nations in hell. (CC)

If לֹא is taken as a simple negative, as many do, the verse would contrast the ignominy Meshech-Tubal would experience in the underworld with the honor some previous warriors had been accorded as indicated by their being buried with their weapons. Block compares the verse with 16:44–59, where Jerusalem is excoriated for being more wicked not only than her sister but even than Sodom. But for Ezekiel to talk of some heathen (even very ancient ones) as having met a glorious death, their lack of circumcision notwithstanding, seems out of character to me. (CC)

**32:28** The verse does not refer to Meshech-Tubal, but to Egypt (“you too”), to whom the whole ode is addressed, although we have not met direct address since the rhetorical question in 32:19a. To make this clear, I have inserted “Pharaoh” in the translation. Thus we meet a preliminary inclusio with 32:19, a sort of summary judgment on Egypt, although Ezekiel has two brief additions in 32:29–30 to his dishonor roll before he finally concludes. (CC)

**32:29** One need not inquire why Edom is included in Ezekiel’s roll call of the dishonorable, because it had been one of Israel’s bêtes noires throughout its history, both before and after Ezekiel’s day. Nothing is said of their “terror” (חִתִּית, which will be attributed again to the Sidonians in 32:30), but only their “strength,” which, however, was of no avail in helping these unbelievers avoid consignment to hell. And the fact that they, though circumcised (so apparently Jer 9:24–25–26 and Josephus later), had to lie with the uncircumcised in death heightens their ignominy. (CC)

A problem of tense arises with this verse. The perfect verb נִתְּנ֥וּ (“are put”) would normally imply the past, and I have construed יִשְׁכָּ֖בוּ (“they lie”) as a present, though it could imply the future. In a catalogue of those who had already been sent to Sheol, it would be strange if Edom were an exception in this context. The problem arises in the fact that chapter 35 will be totally devoted to a prophecy of Edom’s *future* destruction. However, since the punishment of the unbelievers from that country being sent to hell was both something that happened (repeatedly) in the past and would recur (again, repeatedly) in the future, we probably need not posit any conflict between the two passages. At the outside, one might think of an extended prophetic perfect here or at least prophesied proleptically, but there is no hint in the present text that we need resort to such an explanation. (CC)

**32:30** *Sidonians.* See note on 28:21. (CSB)

The verse is difficult in some details, but exegetically includes the Phoenicians and even peoples living farther north (probably Arameans) in the infernal fellowship of Sheol. (CC)

**32:31** Ezekiel concludes this oracle about Egypt (and effects an inclusio for the whole oracle) by a two-verse reminder that Egypt (named explicitly in 32:18 near the start of the oracle, but not specifically mentioned after that until the mention in 32:31–32 of Pharaoh) has been the real concern all along. When Pharaoh arrives in Sheol, his reaction might have been one of anger or at least deep disappointment when he discovers that he will have to spend eternity in the ignominious company of the uncircumcised and dishonorably buried. But he will “console himself” (that reflexive meaning is better for the Niphal of נָחַם than the passive “be consoled”) when he realizes that his fate is the same as any number of other unbelieving aspirants to divinity, and that he could hardly expect to fare any better than they. “Console himself” implies no honorable or penitential motive, and no true comfort. The Hithpael of the same verb is used in Gen 27:42 for Esau’s intent to “console himself” by killing Jacob, and the Niphal is used in Ezek 31:16, where the well-watered trees “consoled themselves” by the fact that the greatest tree of all, the cedar of Lebanon, had also been brought down into Sheol. (CC)

The echo of exodus language (see the textual note) hints at what the next verse will make more explicit. What Yahweh had accomplished with Egypt in the prophet Ezekiel’s day was not quite as constitutive a redemptive event as his defeat of “Pharaoh and his whole army” (32:31) at the exodus, but it was in the same line of salvific activity by the triune God. It was a tributary to the original exodus as its type, the definitive antitype of which would come on Easter; see ἔξοδος, “exodus,” in Lk 9:31 (cf. also in 2 Pet 1:15). (CC)

The use of the signatory formula, “says the Lord Yahweh,” might suggest the conclusion of the topic, but another thought is important enough that it must yet be added. (CC)

**32:32** This verse is a more explicitly theological counterpart to 32:31. As in earlier verses, there is a contrast between the behavior of Pharaoh and the nations during their life, and their sentence of damnation in Sheol. But the main emphasis is on Yahweh’s orchestration of—ultimately—the whole course of world history. The initial first person verb (“I have set”) signals Yahweh’s mastery of the whole process and virtually demands the Qere “*my* terror” (instead of the Kethib, “his terror/terror of him”) to bring out the full impact. (CC)

“I have set my terror in the land of the living” is an assertion that God himself exercises a “terror” that trumps and finally overwhelms all human terrors. I read the verse as an excellent statement of the indispensable Law (in the Pauline sense) element in the Law-Gospel paradox. The terror of God’s accusations in his Law is necessary to drive the sinner to repentance; fear of God’s judgment is a prerequisite to receiving in faith the consolation of the Gospel, that Christ on our behalf has won for us full pardon, received through faith in him. God finally must overcome death by entering into death himself in the person of his Son, Jesus Christ—and triumphing over it through his resurrection from the dead. Each believer overcomes the fear of death, and all the subsidiary terrors of this fallen world, only by being baptized into Christ’s death and resurrection (Rom 6:1–4; Col 2:11–13; 1 Pet 3:21). (CC)

Zimmerli correctly offers the possibility that in this verse “God in his judgment bestows saving terror on those who see it, in the hope that they awake to a proper fear of him and return to him.” Or from a slightly different perspective, Boadt concludes his exegetical discussion of the oracles against Egypt with the almost proverbial *sic transit gloria mundi* (“so passes away the glory of this world”), which would serve as an appropriate epitaph for all the kingdoms against which all the prophetic Gentile oracles are addressed. (CC)

In this light, the signatory formula, “says the Lord Yahweh,” occurring in both 32:31 and 32:32, far from indicating that 32:31 is a later addendum, sounds like τετέλεσται, “it is finished,” coming from Jesus’ lips in Jn 19:30 as he completed his vicarious atonement for the sins of the world, and thereby accomplished redemption for all. Of course, this does not mean universalism; those without faith in Christ shall, if they perish in their unbelief, be damned to hell for eternity, sharing the fate of Pharaoh and the other unbelievers consigned to Sheol. But Christ’s death and resurrection have opened the everlasting kingdom of God to all, including Gentiles like those addressed in Ezekiel 25–32, and entrance is gained simply by faith in him. (CC)