

Ezekiel 32

St. John Evangelical Lutheran Church

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The Fall of Pharaoh (32:1–16) - Jerusalem had fallen in the summer of 586. It took the survivor about six months to bring news to Ezekiel and the other exiles in Babylon in January 585 (33:21). About two months later, in March 585, came Ezekiel's last two oracles against Egypt. Both contain reprises and elaborations of earlier oracles. Pharaoh claimed near divinity. Lions are connected to the sun god, Ra, the war god, and lion-headed Sekhmet. But Yahweh executing true judgment is compared to a ravening lion (Is 31:4; 38:13; Hos 5:14; 11:10-11; 13:7; Amos 3:8). Jesus as savior is portrayed as the conquering "lion from the tribe of Judah" (Rev. 5:5; Gen 49:10; Ezek 21:27). In Yahweh's eyes, Pharaoh's claims are comic, instead showing him as a defeated sea monster or a repugnant crocodile. Yahweh brings judgment with the net of many nations (v.3). Pharaoh is also depicted as a "world beast" (v.5), like the dragon in Rev 12 and the beast from the sea in Rev 13. Then the language turns grotesque, eschatological, and even apocalyptic (v.6-8). Like the king of Babylon (Is 13:10; 14:12), Pharaoh is compared to a bright star, again an antitype of the fall of Satan. The overthrow of the world power of Pharaoh is an omen and prelude to the overthrow of every ungodly world power on the day of the last judgment. Note also the return to chaos, as in chapter 31.

Then the figurative language of v.2-8 shifts to literal terms: the immanent Babylonian devastation of Egypt as Yahweh's sword. The king does not come alone but with all his ruthless allies (v.9-12). Pharaoh is judged for challenging and obscuring the clear streams of God's grace and promise. Throughout both OT and NT and in Christian usage and symbolism, oil describes the life-giving power of the Spirit and the blessings of Christ's Word. Yahweh's purpose in judgment is to move people to repentance, but if they do not repent, at least they will welcome His lordship (Phil 2:10-11). The NT declares that through the church age, Satan will intensify his attacks against the church, culminating in a final assault (Rev 20:7-10), but at the return of Christ, all opponents of God's kingdom will be vanquished forever (Rev 20:10-15).

Pharaoh Descends into Sheol (v. 17–32) - The last in the collection of Ezekiel's Gentile oracles is a sequel and conclusion to the preceding one. Alongside Isaiah 14, this is one of the OT's most detailed depictions of the nether region. It also shows the power of the prophetic word, which does not only proclaim or predict but brings reality to pass. It is the efficacious Word of Yahweh, which always accomplishes what it says (Is 55:10-11). The prophet makes Egypt go down to the underworld, including the professional mourning women of 32:16. God is described as working mediately, not only through "called and ordained" prophets but through other agents who have no idea whom they are really serving.

The prophet's speech (v. 19ff) is dripping with mockery and sarcasm. Who does he think he is? Again, Egyptians (at least priests and kings) practiced circumcision in Tyre, Edom, and Sidon. This is for his Israelite audience, who would find such a burial or death abhorrent since they had broken God's covenant and would be cut off from their kin (Gen 17:14). It would be similar to expressing the fate of Pharaoh as consigned to eternal perdition among the unbaptized, who are unbelievers (Rev 20:15; 21:27). This includes the Egyptian war criminals and Assyria. The higher the arrogant

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unbeliever aspires and rises on earth, the more egregious his sins against God and his fellow humans, and the deeper he is consigned to the underworld. There are degrees of punishment in hell (Lk 12:47-48; James 3:1), just as there are degrees of glory for the redeemed in heaven (Dan 12:3; Lk 19:16-19). The reign of terror in the land of the living is contrasted with their impotence in Sheol.

Elam is one of the least well-known major civilizations of the ancient Near East. It is usually considered as beginning around 3200 B.C. and was finally conquered by Alexander the Great in 331. Elam developed writing around the same time as the Sumerians. The Bible does not flesh out major details of Elamite history. In the Table of Nations (Gen 10:22; 1 Chr 1:17), Elam appears as a son of Shem, alongside Asshur, Arpochshad, Lud, and Aram. The most famous Elamite is Chedorlaomer (Gen 14:1,9), among the four kings who capture Lot. Isaiah 22:6 associates Elam with archery, chariotry, and calvary. Jeremiah (49:34-39) devotes a Gentile oracle against Elam. Is 11:1 speaks of Israelites dispersed Edom, and Ezra (2:7, 31; 8:7) mentions them returning. Elamite pilgrims are among those in Jerusalem on Pentecost (Acts 2:9).

Mesech and Tubal are two Anatolian nations. Only a little is known of their history, too. There is no known contact with Israel, but they probably were associated with Assyria. Edom has long been a bane on Israel's side. Ezekiel will present their complete destruction in chapter 35. And as in chapter 31, misery loves company. Pharaoh will console himself to be the same as all the other unbelieving aspiring "divine" kings.

Finally, God Himself exercises a "terror" that trumps and finally overwhelms all human terrors. The terrors of God's accusations of His Law are 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 won for us full pardon, received through faith in Him. God must overcome death by entering into death Himself in the person of His Son, Jesus Christ—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). Thus says the Lord Yahweh reminds us "It is finished" from Jesus (Jn 19:30).