

EZEKIEL 29

AGAINST EGYPT, PART 1

We come now to the last of the heathen kingdoms against which the prophet was commissioned to utter the judgments of the Lord. It is also the one that occupies the largest space in these visions of the prophet – which is not necessarily surprising, considering the important position which Egypt occupied for so long in the world's history. Its physical location was at a much greater distance from the children of Israel than Tyre; yet as a kingdom, Egypt held a much closer connection with them. And the Egyptians sought to obtain the same high degree of power in the world that Tyre did in commerce. It was with this objective, and not from any desire to benefit the nation of Judah, that the king of Egypt began – about the same time that Ezekiel was now prophesying – to cultivate a friendship with King Zedekiah. By sending an army to his relief, the Egyptians obliged the Babylonians – for a short time – to lift the siege against Jerusalem (Jer. 37:7-11). But in this seeming act of kindness for Zedekiah, the real intention of the king of Egypt was to create a diversion against the Babylonian monarch; and if possible, to put an end to the victorious career of that dangerous rival.

It is reported of one particular Pharaoh that he was so proud of his successes, and so secure of his power and dominion, that he said that not even a god could deprive him of his kingdom! It was while such a man as this held the scepter of Egypt – and while he was still in the noontide of his prosperity – that Ezekiel began to utter the words here recorded against him. The prophecy against Egypt consists of a few separate pieces, which each have their respective dates. The first of these (verses 1-16) coincides with the 10th year of the prophet's captivity, around 587 BC; and it is a general announcement – in parabolical style – of the punishment of the king of Egypt, because of his intolerable self-sufficiency and pride.

The first seven verses employ striking imagery to describe the high thoughts that the king of Egypt had concerning his own invincible might and glory, and the state of utter helplessness and ruin to which he would be reduced. It was the same old controversy which had formerly been waged in the land of Egypt itself. The Pharaoh of Moses' time stepped forth into open rivalry with God; and he sought, in personal conflict, to dispute with Him for the mastery. The Pharaoh of Ezekiel's time – presuming on his God-like self-sufficiency – portrayed himself as one who was not only able to stand his own ground against all powerful assailants; but also as one who was qualified to take the place of God Himself, and administer help to the Lord's covenant-people in their hour of

Outline of the chapter:

- ❖ A general announcement – in parabolical style – of the punishment of the king of Egypt, because of his intolerable self-sufficiency and pride – verses 1-16
- ❖ The Lord promises to give Egypt as easy booty for the Babylonians – verses 17-20
- ❖ God's promises of mercy that He had in store for the house of Israel – verse 21



need. But never could the means of Israel's deliverance come from that old house of bondage! And their very attempt to seek it there was met with the rod of chastisement. The staff of Egypt utterly failed the Jews at the very time when they were especially desirous to lean upon it, and then they were left as a helpless prey in the hands of their ruthless conquerors. But this manifest insufficiency on the part of Pharaoh to give efficient aid was only the prelude of his own overthrow; and the mournful calamities that would soon befall him and his land would effectually prevent him from ever again presuming to play the part of God, as he had been impiously doing. This, however, is more plainly disclosed in verses 8-16, where we are shown that the sin of pride is enough to ruin a whole nation. However, the prophet does speak of the restoration of Egypt after 40 years. Although God will find a way to humble the proud, yet He will not contend forever. Nevertheless, they would not be such a great world-power as they had formerly been. And so Israel would no longer be tempted to trust in Egypt or repose their confidence in them, instead of in the Lord.

The prophecy in verses 17-21 was given 16 years after the words in the first part of the chapter – around 570 BC. After the destruction of Jerusalem (586 BC), Nebuchadnezzar spent two or three campaigns in the conquest of the Ammonites and Moabites – making himself master of their countries. Then he spent 13 years in the siege of Tyre. During all that time, the Egyptians were embroiled in war with the Cyrenians and with one another, by which they were very much weakened and impoverished. And right at the time when the siege of Tyre ended, God delivers this prophecy to Ezekiel, to show him that the utter destruction of Egypt – which he had foretold 16 years before – would now be completed by Nebuchadnezzar. God gave the land of Egypt into the hands of this heathen monarch as a cheap and easy prey, which was subdued with very little difficulty, in order to repay him for the hard service that his army had engaged in against Tyre.

This chapter concludes with the Lord's promises of mercy that He had in store for the house of Israel soon after this. Nebuchadnezzar was in the zenith of his glory when he conquered Egypt; but now the day of deliverance for the Lord's captive people would begin to dawn, and they also would have some reviving and honor done to them. "In that day will I cause the horn of the house of Israel to bud forth, and I will give thee the opening of the mouth in the midst of them" (verse 21). Israel's own princes (like Daniel and his three friends) were "the horns" here spoken of. But is this not a gracious promise concerning the Lord Jesus? Who except He can be said to be the horn of His people? And what is the opening of the mouth, spiritually considered, except the Savior proclaiming redemption to those who have been held captive in sin?

Lord, preserve us from yielding to the temptation to place our confidence in worldly supports, which we are so prone to lean upon, instead of upon You! Amen.