

EZEKIEL 31

AGAINST EGYPT, PART 3

The prophecy of this chapter, just as the two chapters before, is against Egypt; and it is particularly intended for the humbling and mortifying of Pharaoh. When passing sentence upon great criminals, it is usual to consult precedents, and to see what has been done to others in similar cases; and this serves both to direct and to justify the proceedings. Here in this prophecy, Pharaoh stands indicted at the bar of Divine justice for his pride and haughtiness, and the injuries he had done to God's people; but he thinks himself so high and so great that he is not accountable to any authority, and so strong and so well-guarded that he is not conquerable by any force. Therefore, Ezekiel is directed to make a report to him concerning the case of the king of Assyria, whose capital city had been Nineveh. He was to show him how great a monarch the king of Assyria had once been; he had possessed a vast empire, and mighty sway over other nations. Not even the king of Egypt – great as he was – could surpass him in his glory and greatness. But Ezekiel must also show Pharaoh how much he was like the king of Assyria in his pride and carnal security; and he was to remind him of the fall and ruin of the king of Assyria, which had given a fair warning to all other powerful princes to take heed of the sin of pride. Then he was to leave the king of Egypt to apply all this to himself. In the looking-glass of the Assyrian monarch's sin, Pharaoh was to see his own face; and in that proud man's ruin, he was to foresee – as with a spyglass – his own downfall.

The prophet is directed to begin by putting Pharaoh upon a search in the records of history for a case that was parallel to his own (verse 2). "Whom art thou like in thy greatness?" Ezekiel asks. We are often prone to judge ourselves by comparison. Those who think highly of themselves imagine themselves to be as great and as good as such-and-such persons who have been mightily celebrated. The flatterers of princes tell them whom they equal, both in pomp and in grandeur. "Well," says the Lord, "let Pharaoh pitch upon the most famous potentate that ever lived; and we will grant him that he is like that great person, and is in no way inferior to him. But let Pharaoh select whomever he will, and he will find that even that great man's day came to fall. He will see there was an end of all his perfection; and therefore, he must expect the end of his own glory in the same manner." The falls of others – both into sin and into ruin – are intended to be admonitions to us to not be high-minded.

In answer to this challenge in verse 2, the mighty king of Assyria is brought into view, under the picture of a cedar tree in Lebanon, which was

Outline of the chapter:

- ❖ Ezekiel is directed to compare Pharaoh, in his sins of pride and carnal security, with the man who had formerly been the great king of Assyria – verses 1-10
- ❖ He reminds Pharaoh of the fall and ruin of the Assyrian monarch – verses 11-17
- ❖ He is to leave Pharaoh to see herein his own sin and downfall – verse 18

transferred in the prophet's imagination to the land of beauty and perfection – the Garden of Eden that God Himself had planted. There this cedar is described as flourishing and growing until it overtopped – in magnificence and beauty – all the trees of the field around it. But it was only so that it might provide yet another specimen of that instability and transitoriness which belongs



to all persons and things on earth, when the good that is bestowed by heaven is misused for purposes of selfishness – and when the creature begins to thrust himself into the place of his Creator. And so even this unparalleled cedar tree – when it forgot its own rightful place – was given up to destruction.

The king of Assyria, whom this cedar tree represented, had enjoyed a position of unparalleled greatness. He was the head and center of a vast world-monarchy; but his peerless grandeur proved to be the occasion of his overthrow, for it only served to nurse into fatal maturity that awful pride that precedes a terrible fall. How thoroughly the loftiness of spirit in the head of the Assyrian monarchy kept pace with the growth and magnitude of his dominion may be seen from the heaven-daring language of Sennacherib to King Hezekiah – when, before the gates of Jerusalem, his servants openly blasphemed and defied the God of Israel. Most truly was his heart lifted up in his greatness, and so the hand of a righteous God could do no other than cast him down. This was a lesson to the world, on a gigantic scale, how the Lord – in His Providence – abases the proud and scatters the mighty from their lofty seats. And the chapter concludes with a prediction of the fall of the king of Egypt, just as the ruler of Assyria had fallen (verse 18). Pharaoh thought himself to be like the Assyrian monarch in glory and greatness – overtopping all the trees of Eden, just as the cedar tree surpasses the shrubs. “But thou also shalt be brought down,” says the Lord. Great men and great multitudes – along with the great figure and great noise that they make in the world – will soon become less than nothing, when God comes to contend with them. Such were Pharaoh and his people.

It is hardly possible to read of the Lord's judgments of other nations, and of His tenderness to His own people of Israel, without being struck with astonishment at His distinguishing mercy. When we consider the fewness and littleness of the Lord's people, and then contrast their condition with what is here said of the grandeur and earthly glory of both Egypt and Assyria – what an amazing thought it awakens of the glory and grace of our covenant-God in Christ! Let us look up for every grace to keep aloof from all unnecessary acquaintance and connection with this wicked world, no matter how great it may seem to be. May the Lord Jesus help us to humble ourselves and live for His glory alone!

Lord, we confess that our whole nature, like the heathen nations spoken of by the prophet, is exposed to Your just displeasure; but we thank You that the gracious interposition of the Lord Jesus becomes our salvation and redemption! Amen.