EZEKIEL 29

The Monster in the Nile: Egypt's Broken Reed

> *"Then all the inhabitants of Egypt will know that I am the LORD, Because they have been only a staff made of reed to the house of Israel."*
> EZEKIEL 29:6

Where Ezekiel has brought us

1. Ezekiel has spent the middle of his book turning from Jerusalem to the nations around her.

2. The first oracle is dated “In the tenth year, in the tenth month, on the twelfth of the month” (v1) — January 587 BC.

Seven Oracles Against Egypt

Ezekiel 29–32 · dated by the years of Jehoiachin’s exile

1	29:1–16	10th yr, 10th mo · Jan 587 BC	The monster in the Nile
2	29:17–21	27th yr, 1st mo · 571 BC	Egypt as Babylon’s wages
3	30:1–19	undated	The day of the LORD
4	30:20–26	11th yr, 1st mo · spring 587 BC	Pharaoh’s broken arm
5	31:1–18	11th yr, 3rd mo · June 587 BC	The fallen cedar
		Jerusalem falls (Jer 39:2)	
6	32:1–16	12th yr, 12th mo · Mar 585 BC	Lament for the crocodile
7	32:17–32	12th yr, 15th day · 585 BC	Down to the pit

Gold outline = Ezekiel 29. Oracle 2 (571 BC) is the latest date in the book.

The Great Monster in the Nile

God sets His face against the king who said, "My Nile is mine."

EZEKIEL 29:2

"Son of man, set your face against Pharaoh king of Egypt and prophesy against him and against all Egypt.

DAVID GUZIK

Guzik, quoting Morgan, notes that Pharaoh is pictured 'not as worshipping the River, but claiming to possess it, and to have created it.'

WHAT IT MEANS

The date is January 587 BC. Jerusalem has been under siege for a year, and Zedekiah is hoping Egypt will ride to the rescue.

tannin (תַּנִּין)
TANNIN · "MONSTER"

The notes define tannin as a sea or river monster, a serpent, a crocodile. Here it is the crocodile, the lord of the Nile, "The great monster that lies in the midst of his rivers" (v3).

What Pharaoh Claimed, What God Did



The chapter's contrasts: every boast and false support of Egypt is answered by an act of God.

A Staff Made of Reed

Egypt looked like support, but it splintered in Israel's hand.

EZEKIEL 29:6

"Then all the inhabitants of Egypt will know that I am the LORD, Because they have been only a staff made of reed to the house of Israel.

DAVID GUZIK

Guzik, quoting Taylor, calls Hophra's march in 588 BC 'little more than a token foray on the Egyptians' part.' The Babylonians lifted the siege for a moment (Jer 37:5–11), Egypt pulled back, and Jerusalem fell.

WHAT IT MEANS

Here is the reason God judges Egypt in relation to His people: "they have been only a staff made of reed to the house of Israel" (v6).

qaneh (קָנֶה)

QANEH · "REED"

A qaneh is a reed, a stalk, a cane — the tall marsh plant that grows thick along the Nile. Egypt was "a staff made of reed to the house of Israel" (v6).

Forty Years of Desolation

From Migdol to Syene, the proud land will lie empty.

EZEKIEL 29:8

'Therefore thus says the Lord GOD, "Behold, I will bring upon you a sword and I will cut off from you man and beast.

DAVID GUZIK

Block, in Guzik, compares "from Migdol to Syene" (v10) to Israel's 'from Dan to Beer-sheba' — the whole country, north to south.

WHAT IT MEANS

God brings the sword, and the reason is stated plainly: because Pharaoh said, "The Nile is mine, and I have made it" (v9). Pride is never a private sin for a king; it brings a whole land down with him.

shemamah (שְׁמָמָה)
SHEMAMAH · "DESOLATION"

Shemamah means a waste, a devastation. It is the hammer word of this section: Egypt "will become a desolation and waste" (v9), "an utter waste and desolation" (v10), "a desolation in the midst of desolated lands" (v12).

Restored, but Lowly

Egypt returns — never again a power, never again Israel's confidence.

EZEKIEL 29:13

'For thus says the Lord GOD, "At the end of forty years I will gather the Egyptians from the peoples among whom they were scattered.

DAVID GUZIK

Guzik, passing on Vawter and Hoppe, notes that Egypt is the only foreign nation in Ezekiel promised a restoration. Yet the restoration has a ceiling.

WHAT IT MEANS

Even in judgment God shows mercy: "At the end of forty years I will gather the Egyptians" (v13). But the mercy has a purpose for Israel too.

shaphal (שָׁפָל)
SHAPHAL · "LOWLY"

Shaphal means low, humble, base. God will bring the Egyptians back to Pathros, Upper Egypt, "and there they will be a lowly kingdom" (v14).

Egypt as Babylon's Wages

Seventeen years later God pays Nebuchadnezzar for his labor at Tyre.

EZEKIEL 29:18

"Son of man, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon made his army labor hard against Tyre; every head was made bald and every shoulder was rubbed bare. But he and his army had no wages from Tyre for the labor that he had performed against it."

DAVID GUZIK

Nebuchadnezzar's thirteen-year siege of Tyre rubbed his soldiers' heads bald and their shoulders raw.

WHAT IT MEANS

Seventeen years after the first oracle, God speaks again to finish the Egypt theme.

sakar (שָׂכָר)

SAKAR · "WAGES"

Sakar means hire, pay, reward — a soldier's wages. Nebuchadnezzar and his army had "no wages from Tyre for the labor that he had performed against it" (v18); the notes pair it with abodah (H5656), work or service.

A Horn for Israel

On that day strength sprouts, and the prophet's mouth is opened.

EZEKIEL 29:21

"On that day I will make a horn sprout for the house of Israel, and I will open your mouth in their midst. Then they will know that I am the LORD."

DAVID GUZIK

Guzik notes the parallel with Psalm 132:17, which some read as messianic, but he judges that the context here is Israel's restoration.

WHAT IT MEANS

In the middle of Israel's ruin, God promises new strength: "On that day I will make a horn sprout for the house of Israel" (v21).

qeren (קֶרֶן)

QEREN · "HORN"

Qeren is a horn — and in Scripture, a picture of strength and power (1 Sam 2:1; Ps 92:10). The notes pair it with tsamach (H6779), to spring up, grow, bud.

What to carry from this chapter

1

Ownership is the root boast.

Pharaoh did not merely worship the Nile; he claimed to own and create it (v3) — what Morgan, in Guzik, calls ‘self-deification.’

2

God hunts crocodiles.

The beast Egypt prayed its king would be is hooked by the jaw and dragged out onto the open field (vv4–5).

3

Tannin means monster.

The word for Pharaoh is the river monster, the crocodile — the same word God uses for him again in 32:2.

4

A reed only looks like a staff.

Egypt seemed strong, but when Israel leaned on it, it broke and tore their hands (vv6–7).

More to carry

5

The forty years are debated.

Feinberg, in Guzik, admits no such period is known in Egyptian history, yet sees no signal in the text that the number is figurative.

6

Mercy with a ceiling.

Egypt is restored, but as “the lowest of the kingdoms” — never again Israel’s confidence (vv15–16).

7

God pays His debts.

Guzik: Nebuchadnezzar’s armies ‘worked for God as His instruments of judgment,’ and God paid them with Egypt (vv19–20).

8

Sakar is a soldier’s pay.

The word for wages is ordinary hire; the Lord keeps the ledger even of a pagan army (vv18–19).

Talk it through

1. Pharaoh said, “My Nile is mine.” What in your life do you talk about as if you made it yourself?

2. What reed staffs have you leaned on, and what did they do to your hands when they broke?

3. Why would God remove Egypt as Israel’s confidence — and what might He be removing from you?

4. God paid even Nebuchadnezzar for his labor. How does that change the way you see work for God that seems unrewarded?

5. Where do you need God to make a horn sprout — strength growing out of what looks dead?

CLOSING

Pharaoh lay on the sand, and the reed staff lay in splinters. But the God who made the Nile still holds every man who leans his whole weight on Him — and He can make strength sprout where everything looked dead.

Teaching the Word. Watching the Times. — Smith For Christ

O·I·A study, slides and reflection journal: see the Ezekiel study page.