Ezekiel 29

The Monster in the Nile: Egypt, the Broken Reed

OBSERVATION · INTERPRETATION · APPLICATION

"These were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so."
Acts 17:11

CHAPTER THEME

Pharaoh claimed to own and even create the river that made him. God hooked him like a crocodile and laid him on the sand. Every false support Israel leaned on — Egypt most of all — splintered in their hands. God alone is Creator, Owner and the One worth leaning on, and He uses even pagan armies to do His work.

Ed Smith · Started 20 October 2026

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00 The Text

EZEKIEL 29 (KJV), MARKED

▲ Gold God — His character & actions | Green Command / instruction | ⇄ Sky Key repeated word
⚠ Rose Sin / warning | ★ Violet Promise / blessing | ◷ Amber Time / place / contrast

1 ◷ In the tenth year, in the tenth month, in the twelfth day of the month, the word of the LORD came unto me, saying,

2 Son of man, Green set thy face against Pharaoh king of Egypt, and prophesy against him, and against all Egypt:

3 Speak, and say, ▲ Thus saith the Lord GOD; ▲ Behold, I am against thee, Pharaoh king of Egypt, ⚠ the great dragon that lieth in the midst of his rivers, which hath said, ⚠ My river is mine own, and I have made it for myself.

4 But ▲ I will put hooks in thy jaws, and I will cause the fish of thy rivers to stick unto thy scales, and I will bring thee up out of the midst of thy rivers, and all the fish of thy rivers shall stick unto thy scales.

5 And I will leave thee thrown into the wilderness, thee and all the fish of thy rivers: thou shalt fall upon the open fields; thou shalt not be brought together, nor gathered: I have given thee for meat to the beasts of the field and to the fowls of the heaven.

6 And all the inhabitants of Egypt ⇄ shall know that I am the LORD, because they have been ⚠ a staff of reed to the house of Israel.

7 When they took hold of thee by thy hand, thou didst break, and rend all their shoulder: and ⚠ when they leaned upon thee, thou brakest, and madest all their loins to be at a stand.

8 Therefore ▲ thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, ▲ I will bring a sword upon thee, and cut off man and beast out of thee.

9 And the land of Egypt shall be ⇄ desolate and waste; and they ⇄ shall know that I am the LORD: because he hath said, The river is mine, and I have made it.

10 Behold, therefore I am against thee, and against thy rivers, and I will make the land of Egypt utterly waste and ⇄ desolate, ◷ from the tower of Syene even unto the border of Ethiopia.

11 No foot of man shall pass through it, nor foot of beast shall pass through it, neither shall it be inhabited ◷ forty years.

12 And I will make the land of Egypt ⇄ desolate in the midst of the countries that are ⇄ desolate, and her cities among the cities that are laid waste shall be ⇄ desolate ◷ forty years: and ▲ I will scatter the Egyptians among the nations, and will disperse them through the countries.

13 Yet ▲ thus saith the Lord GOD; At the end of ◷ forty years ★ will I gather the Egyptians from the people whither they were scattered:

14 And I will bring again the captivity of Egypt, and will cause them to return into the land of Pathros, into the land of their habitation; and they shall be there a base kingdom.

15 ◷ It shall be the basest of the kingdoms; neither shall it exalt itself any more above the nations: for I will diminish them, that they shall no more rule over the nations.

16 And ⚠ it shall be no more the confidence of the house of Israel, which bringeth their iniquity to remembrance, when they shall look after them: but they ⇄ shall know that I am the Lord GOD.

17 And it came to pass in the seven and twentieth year, in the first month, in the first day of the month, the word of the LORD came unto me, saying,

18 Son of man, Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon caused his army to serve a great service against Tyrus: every head was made bald, and every shoulder was peeled: yet had he no wages, nor his army, for Tyrus, for the service that he had served against it:

19 Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I will give the land of Egypt unto Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon; and he shall take her multitude, and take her spoil, and take her prey; and it shall be the wages for his army.

20 I have given him the land of Egypt for his labour wherewith he served against it, because they wrought for me, saith the Lord GOD.

21 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; and they shall know that I am the LORD.

Marked in the text

- **v1** In the tenth year, in the tenth month
- **v2** set thy face against Pharaoh king of Egypt
- **v3** Thus saith the Lord GOD *(every occurrence)*
- **v3** Behold, I am against thee, Pharaoh king of Egypt
- **v3** the great dragon that lieth in the midst of his rivers
- **v3** My river is mine own, and I have made it for myself
- **v4** I will put hooks in thy jaws
- **v6** shall know that I am the LORD *(every occurrence)*
- **v6** a staff of reed to the house of Israel
- **v7** when they leaned upon thee, thou brakest
- **v8** I will bring a sword upon thee
- **v9** desolate *(every occurrence)*
- **v10** from the tower of Syene even unto the border of Ethiopia
- **v11** forty years *(every occurrence)*
- **v12** I will scatter the Egyptians among the nations
- **v13** will I gather the Egyptians
- **v15** It shall be the basest of the kingdoms
- **v16** it shall be no more the confidence of the house of Israel
- **v17** in the seven and twentieth year
- **v18** yet had he no wages
- **v19** it shall be the wages for his army
- **v20** because they wrought for me
- **v21** the horn of the house of Israel to bud forth
- **v21** I will give thee the opening of the mouth

Marks are drawn on the KJV text. Quotations in the notes are from the NASB95, so their wording may differ from the KJV above.

01 Observation

WHAT DOES THE TEXT SAY?

KEY VERSE · EZEKIEL 29:3 (KJV)

3 Speak, and say, ▲ Thus saith the Lord GOD; ▲ Behold, I am against thee, Pharaoh king of Egypt, ⚠ the great dragon that lieth in the midst of his rivers, which hath said, ⚠ My river is mine own, and I have made it for myself.

Setting

"In the tenth year, in the tenth month, on the twelfth of the month" (v1) — January 587 BC. Babylon's army has surrounded Jerusalem for a year, and King Zedekiah is hoping Egypt will rescue him (Jer 37:5–8). Ezekiel, among the exiles in Babylon, turns to Egypt. This chapter opens four chapters of oracles against Egypt (chs 29–32). The second oracle (vv17–21) is dated "in the twenty-seventh year, in the first month, on the first of the month" (v17) — spring 571 BC, the latest date in the book, set here because it finishes the Egypt theme.

Structure

- vv1–5 — **the great monster in the Nile:** "set your face against Pharaoh king of Egypt" (v2). "Behold, I am against you, Pharaoh king of Egypt, The great monster that lies in the midst of his rivers, That has said, 'My Nile is mine, and I myself have made it'" (v3). "I will put hooks in your jaws" (v4), drag him and his clinging fish onto dry land, and "abandon you to the wilderness" (v5) as food for beasts and birds.
- vv6–7 — **a staff made of reed:** Egypt will know the LORD "because they have been only a staff made of reed to the house of Israel" (v6). When Israel grabbed it, it splintered and tore their hands; "when they leaned on you, You broke" (v7).
- vv8–12 — **forty years of desolation:** "I will bring upon you a sword" (v8). Because Pharaoh said, "The Nile is mine, and I have made it" (v9), the land will be desolate "from Migdol to Syene and even to the border of Ethiopia" (v10). "It will not be inhabited for forty years" (v11). "I will scatter the Egyptians among the nations" (v12).
- vv13–16 — **restored, but lowly:** "At the end of forty years I will gather the Egyptians" (v13). "I will turn the fortunes of Egypt" (v14), but "there they will be a lowly kingdom" (v14). "It will be the lowest of the kingdoms, and it will never again lift itself up above the nations" (v15). Egypt will "never again be the confidence of the house of Israel" (v16).
- vv17–20 — **Egypt as Babylon's wages:** Nebuchadnezzar "made his army labor hard against Tyre; every head was made bald and every shoulder was rubbed bare" (v18), "but he and his army had no wages from Tyre" (v18). So God gives him Egypt: "it will be wages for his army" (v19), "because they acted for Me" (v20).
- v21 — **a horn for Israel:** "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" (v21).

Repeated words

Thus says the Lord GOD (vv3, 8, 13, 19); know that I am the LORD / the Lord GOD (vv6, 9, 16, 21); Nile (vv3, 9); desolate / desolation (vv9, 10, 12); forty years (vv11, 12, 13); scatter / scattered (vv12, 13); wages (vv18, 19).

Contrasts

"My Nile is mine, and I myself have made it" (v3) ⟷ the God who drags the monster out of its river (v4). A great monster (v3) ⟷ a lowly kingdom (vv14–15). A staff to lean on (v6) ⟷ a reed that breaks and wounds (v7). No wages from Tyre (v18) ⟷ Egypt as wages (v19). Egypt lowered (v15) ⟷ Israel's horn sprouting (v21).

Chapter theme (my words)

Pharaoh claimed to own and even create the river that made him. God hooked him like a crocodile and laid him on the sand. Every false support Israel leaned on — Egypt most of all — splintered in their hands. God alone is Creator, Owner and the One worth leaning on, and He uses even pagan armies to do His work.

02 Interpretation

WHAT DOES THE TEXT MEAN?

KEY VERSE · EZEKIEL 29:4 (KJV)

4 But ▲ I will put hooks in thy jaws, and I will cause the fish of thy rivers to stick unto thy scales, and I will bring thee up out of the midst of thy rivers, and all the fish of thy rivers shall stick unto thy scales.

The monster in the Nile (vv1–5)

The Pharaoh was Hophra (Greek Apries), named in Jeremiah 44:30. Guzik notes that the date fell, in Feinberg's words, "a year and two days after Nebuchadnezzar had invaded Jerusalem" — that is, after the siege began (2 Kgs 25:1). The "great monster" (*tannim*) is a crocodile, the lord of the Nile. Vawter and Hoppe, in Guzik: "Egyptian prayers encouraged the pharaoh to be a crocodile to his enemies." Pharaoh's boast is the heart of the chapter. Morgan, in Guzik: "Here Pharaoh is represented, not as worshipping the River, but claiming to possess it, and to have created it." Feinberg answers: "Actually, instead of his making the river, the river made him, for without it the land would have been a desert." Morgan again: "all forgetfulness of God amounts at last to self-deification." God will hook the crocodile and drag it out with the fish clinging to its scales — Feinberg sees the fish as Pharaoh's followers who fall with him. Left unburied in the open field (v5) was the deepest shame for a king who built a grand tomb.

A staff made of reed (vv6–7)

This is the reason God judges Egypt in relation to Israel. Egypt had promised help again and again and failed every time (compare Isa 30:1–7; 36:6). In 588 BC Hophra's army did march, and the Babylonians

briefly lifted the siege (Jer 37:5–11) — but Egypt pulled back and Jerusalem fell. Taylor, in Guzik, calls it "little more than a token foray on the Egyptians' part." Poole, in Guzik: Judah's sin was trusting Egypt, and Egypt's sin was breaking its promises. A reed staff looks like support, but when you put your weight on it, it splinters and drives into your hand.

Forty years of desolation (vv8–12)

"From Migdol to Syene" (v10) meant all Egypt, north to south — Block, in Guzik, compares it to Israel's "from Dan to Beer-sheba." Nebuchadnezzar did invade Egypt around 568 BC, and Feinberg cites Berosus that he took Egyptian captives to Babylon. But the forty years are debated. Feinberg, in Guzik, admits "no such forty-year period is known in Egyptian history." Some therefore read the number as a round figure for a generation of judgment (like Israel's forty years in the wilderness). Feinberg, however, notes that nothing in the context signals a shift from literal to figurative language. Guzik does not claim a specific fulfillment.

Restored, but lowly (vv13–16)

Egypt is the only foreign nation in Ezekiel promised a restoration (Vawter and Hoppe, in Guzik). Pathros (v14) is Upper Egypt, the south. But Egypt would never again be a world power. Feinberg, in Guzik, traces its decline under the Persians, the Ptolemies and Rome. History bears it out: after Ezekiel's day, Egypt was ruled by foreign powers for centuries. God's goal is stated in v16: Israel must stop trusting Egypt, because every time they looked to it, it brought their iniquity to mind.

Babylon's wages (vv17–20)

Seventeen years later, God speaks again. Nebuchadnezzar's thirteen-year siege of Tyre (about 586–573 BC) rubbed his soldiers' heads bald from helmets and their shoulders raw from carrying siege materials. Tyre did finally submit, but Clarke, in Guzik, says the Tyrians escaped by sea with their wealth, so there was little plunder. Taylor: "the rewards of the siege were not commensurate with the effort involved." Some critics claim this shows Ezekiel's Tyre prophecy (ch 26) failed. Alexander, in Guzik, answers that God executed His word through Babylon, and complete fulfillment need not come in one siege — Alexander the Great later finished the job. Guzik: "There was a real sense in which Nebuchadnezzar and the armies of Babylon worked for God as His instruments of judgment." God pays His debts — even to a pagan king (compare Isa 45:1; Jer 25:9).

A horn for Israel (v21)

A "horn" in Scripture is strength and power (1 Sam 2:1; Ps 92:10). Psalm 132:17 uses similar words — "I will cause the horn of David to spring forth" — and some read v21 as messianic. Guzik notes that parallel but judges that the context here is Israel's restoration; Alexander, in Guzik, says it "must refer to the strength and encouragement that Israel was to receive," not to Messiah. "I will open your mouth" (v21) recalls Ezekiel's long silence (3:26–27; 24:27; 33:22): when these words came true, the exiles would finally recognize him as a true prophet.

Word study (Hebrew)

- **monster — *tannin* (H8577):** a sea or river monster, serpent, crocodile.
- **Nile — *yeor* (H2975):** the Nile, a river or stream.
- **hooks — *chach* (H2397):** a hook, ring for the nose or jaw.

- **staff — *mishenah* (H4938):** a support, walking stick.
- **reed — *qaneh* (H7070):** a reed, stalk, cane.
- **desolation — *shemamah* (H8077):** a waste, devastation.
- **waste — *chorbah* (H2723):** a ruin, desolate place.
- **scatter — *puts* (H6327):** to disperse, be scattered.
- **lowly — *shaphal* (H8217):** low, humble, base.
- **confidence — *mibtach* (H4009):** the object of trust, a refuge.
- **iniquity — *avon* (H5771):** guilt, perversity.
- **labor — *abodah* (H5656):** work, service.
- **wages — *sakar* (H7939):** hire, pay, reward.
- **horn — *qeren* (H7161):** a horn; strength, power.
- **sprout — *tsamach* (H6779):** to spring up, grow, bud.

Cross-references

Exod 5:2; 2 Kgs 18:21; 2 Kgs 25:1; Ps 20:7; Ps 118:8–9; Ps 132:17; Prov 16:5; Isa 30:1–7; Isa 31:1–3; Isa 36:6; Isa 45:1; Jer 17:5–8; Jer 25:9; Jer 37:5–11; Jer 44:30; Ezek 3:26–27; Ezek 24:27; Ezek 33:22; Luke 1:69; 1 Cor 3:6–7.

03 Application

HOW DOES IT CHANGE ME?

KEY VERSE · EZEKIEL 29:21 (KJV)

21 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; and they ⇄ shall know that I am the LORD.

Command to obey — "set your face against Pharaoh."

God told Ezekiel to face the most powerful king of his day and speak the truth (v2). I'm not called to fear the big names, the big money or the big platforms. I'm called to set my face toward God's word and say what He says.

Sin to confess — "My Nile is mine."

Pharaoh said he owned and made the river that made him (v3). I do the same when I talk about "my" business, "my" books, "my" ministry as if I built them. I'll confess every time I've forgotten that the river came from God, and give Him back ownership.

Warning to heed — the staff made of reed

Egypt looked strong, but when Israel leaned on it, it broke and tore their hands (vv6–7). The men I disciple know reed staffs: the drink, the drug, the gang, the girlfriend, the hustle — each promised support and each splintered. Anything I lean on in place of God will eventually break and wound me.

Promise to trust — "I will make a horn sprout."

In the middle of Israel's ruin, God promised new strength (v21). For the man in a cell or a halfway house who feels like his strength is gone, God can make it sprout again. What looks dead can bud.

Example to follow — Ezekiel's patience

Ezekiel waited years for his words to come true and for people to recognize them as God's (v21). Faithful ministry often means speaking now and waiting a long time for fruit. I'll keep teaching, writing and building, and leave the timing to God.

Worship

You made the Nile, the seas and every river. You hold the crocodile kings on Your hook. You pay even pagan armies their wages, and You never break when I lean on You. You are the LORD.

Prayer

Lord GOD, You alone are Creator and Owner. Forgive me for calling Your gifts "mine." Break my grip on every reed staff I've leaned on, and teach me to lean my whole weight on You. Make strength sprout again in the men I serve, and open my mouth to speak Your word faithfully. Amen.