EZEKIEL 31

The Fallen Cedar: Pride Topples the Tallest Tree

> *“To which among the trees of Eden are you thus equal in glory and greatness? Yet you will be brought down with the trees of Eden to the earth beneath; you will lie in the midst of the uncircumcised, with those who were slain by the sword. So is Pharaoh and all his hordes!”*
> EZEKIEL 31:18

Where Ezekiel has brought us

1. Chapter 31 is the fifth of Ezekiel's seven oracles against Egypt (chs 29–32).

2. Instead of another direct oracle, God gives Ezekiel a question and a parable.

"Whom are you like in your greatness?" (v2)

ASSYRIA · THE CEDAR		EGYPT · PHARAOH
Tallest cedar of Lebanon (v3)	=	Proud of its greatness (v2)
Watered by the deep (v4)	=	Proud of the endless Nile
Nations lived in its shade (v6)	=	Judah hiding in its shade
Cut down · Nineveh falls 612 BC	=	Babylon's sword is coming
Down to Sheol (vv15–17)	=	Among the uncircumcised (v18)

Wiersbe, in Guzik: 'if Babylon can conquer Assyria, Babylon can conquer Egypt.'

Whom Are You Like?

God puts a question to a proud king and his hordes.

EZEKIEL 31:2

"Son of man, say to Pharaoh king of Egypt and to his hordes, 'Whom are you like in your greatness?

DAVID GUZIK

Guzik places this as the fifth of the seven oracles against Egypt, given about two months after 30:20 and roughly a month before Jerusalem fell.

WHAT IT MEANS

God opens with a question rather than a verdict: "Whom are you like in your greatness?" (v2). It is the kind of question a wise father asks a son who is getting too big for himself — not to humiliate him, but to make him think.

godel (גֹּדֶל)

GODEL · "GREATNESS"

Godel means magnitude, greatness — and, the notes observe, it is often a word for pride. God's question to Pharaoh turns on it: "Whom are you like in your greatness?"

The Great Cedar

Assyria rose above every tree in the forest — and God made it beautiful.

EZEKIEL 31:3

'Behold, Assyria was a cedar in Lebanon With beautiful branches and forest shade, And very high, And its top was among the clouds.

DAVID GUZIK

Who is the tree? Some older writers (Poole, Trapp, Clarke) think of the ancient Assyria of Nimrod and Babel; Guzik calls that unlikely.

WHAT IT MEANS

The parable is lavish. The cedar is watered by the deep (v4), its boughs are many, "All the birds of the heavens nested in its boughs," and "all great nations lived under its shade" (v6).

erez (אֶרֶז)

EREZ · "CEDAR"

Erez is the cedar, the strongest and tallest of trees, the pride of Lebanon. Assyria "was a cedar in Lebanon With beautiful branches and forest shade" (v3).

The Parable of the Cedar



Ezekiel 31 in three scenes: the cedar rising by God's gift, cut down for its pride, and sent down to Sheol.

The Cedar Cut Down

Because its heart was haughty, God handed it to a despot.

EZEKIEL 31:10

'Therefore thus says the Lord GOD, "Because it is high in stature and has set its top among the clouds, and its heart is haughty in its loftiness,

DAVID GUZIK

Guzik identifies the "despot of the nations" in v11 with Nebuchadnezzar — the same king God will now send against Egypt.

WHAT IT MEANS

The charge is pride, and the sentence is swift: "I will give it into the hand of a despot of the nations" (v11). Notice who is acting: "According to its wickedness I have driven it away" (v11).

rum (רוּם)

RUM · "HAUGHTY"

Rum means to be high, lifted up — and then to exalt oneself. It stands behind the charge of v10: the tree "has set its top among the clouds, and its heart is haughty in its loftiness."

Down to Sheol

The nations quake, and the trees of Eden are comforted below.

EZEKIEL 31:15

'Thus says the Lord GOD, "On the day when it went down to Sheol I caused lamentations; I closed the deep over it and held back its rivers. And its many waters were stopped up, and I made Lebanon mourn for it, and all the trees of the field wilted away on account of it.

DAVID GUZIK

Guzik suggests that the held-back rivers of v15 may also point to Egypt's canals failing when the Nile ran low. The nations quake (v16) because if Assyria can fall, so can they.

WHAT IT MEANS

The fall of a giant shakes everyone. God says, "I made the nations quake at the sound of its fall" (v16).

sheol (שְׁאוֹל)
SHEOL · "SHEOL"

Sheol is the realm of the dead — the grave, the underworld. The notes pair it with bor (H953), the pit.

So Is Pharaoh

The question of v2 returns, and the answer is the grave.

EZEKIEL 31:18

"To which among the trees of Eden are you thus equal in glory and greatness? Yet you will be brought down with the trees of Eden to the earth beneath; you will lie in the midst of the uncircumcised, with those who were slain by the sword. So is Pharaoh and all his hordes!"' declares the Lord GOD."

DAVID GUZIK

Guzik's conclusion is that the chapter speaks of Assyria, but it is aimed at Egypt. The question of v2 returns in v18, and whichever tree Pharaoh compares himself to, he will fall like it.

WHAT IT MEANS

The chapter ends by turning the parable on Pharaoh: "To which among the trees of Eden are you thus equal in glory and greatness?"

arel (עָרֵל)

AREL · "UNCIRCUMCISED"

Arel means uncircumcised — outside the covenant, unclean. Pharaoh "will lie in the midst of the uncircumcised, with those who were slain by the sword" (v18).

What to carry from this chapter

1

A question before a verdict.

God asks Pharaoh, “Whom are you like in your greatness?”

2

Godel cuts both ways.

The word for greatness often carries the sense of pride; it frames the whole chapter in vv2, 7 and 18.

3

The plain reading.

Guzik: God describes Assyria while speaking to Egypt — a fresh example, since Nineveh fell in 612 BC.

4

Height is a gift.

“I made it beautiful,” God says (v9); the tree’s glory was never its own doing.

More to carry

5

Pride is the charge.

Its top among the clouds and its heart haughty in its loftiness — that is why the cedar fell (v10).

6

Death levels every tree.

Taylor, in Guzik: ‘Death is the great equalizer and the surest antidote to an excess of ambition.’

7

Shade-dwellers fall too.

Those who lived under the cedar’s shade went down to Sheol with it (v17).

8

Arel is a shameful bed.

For circumcised Egypt, lying among the uncircumcised was the ultimate humiliation (v18).

Talk it through

1. Whom do you compare yourself with — and does that comparison make you proud or teachable?

2. God says, “I made it beautiful.” What gifts in your life have you quietly taken credit for?

3. What big tree have you lived under the shade of, and what happened to the people under it when it fell?

4. Whose story of a fall — maybe your own — could keep another man from repeating it?

CLOSING

Assyria's cedar touched the clouds, and then it lay broken across the ravines. God makes trees tall, and God brings them down — so stay low, give Him the credit, and find your shelter under the One who never falls.

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

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