

# CHAPTER 31

## INTRODUCTION TO EZEKIEL 31

This chapter contains a confirmation of the preceding prophecy, of the ruin of the king of Egypt, by the example of the king of Assyria, to whom he was like in grandeur and pride, and would be in his fall. The time of the prophecy is observed, (<sup>2610</sup>Ezekiel 31:1), the prophet is ordered to give the following relation to the king of Egypt, (<sup>2610</sup>Ezekiel 31:2) in which the king of Assyria is compared to a large and flourishing cedar, for the extent of his dominions, the prosperous state of his empire, and his exaltation above all other princes, which drew upon him their envy (<sup>2610</sup>Ezekiel 31:3-9), wherefore because of his pride, his heart being lifted up with these things, (<sup>2610</sup>Ezekiel 31:10), ruin came upon him; which is described by the instruments and manner of it, and the effects following it; mourning and fear in some, solace and comfort to others, and destruction to his associates, (<sup>2611</sup>Ezekiel 31:11-17), wherefore Pharaoh is called upon to consider all this, who was like to him in greatness and pride, and should have the like fate with him; nor could his greatness any more secure him than it did the Assyrian monarch, (<sup>2618</sup>Ezekiel 31:18).

**Ver. 1.** *And it came to pass in the eleventh year, &c.]* Of Zedekiah's reign, and Jeconiah's captivity:

*in the third month, in the first day of the month:* the month Sivan, which began on the twentieth of our May, and answers to part of May, and part of June; this was about seven weeks after the former prophecy, and about five weeks before the destruction of Jerusalem; according to Bishop Usher<sup>f561</sup>, this was on the nineteenth of June, on the first day of the week, in 3416 A.M. or before Christ 588:

*that the word of the Lord came unto me, saying;* as follows:

**Ver. 2.** *Son of man, speak unto Pharaoh king of Egypt, &c.]* To Pharaohhophra, the then reigning king; not to him personally by word of mouth, for the prophet was now in Chaldea; but by delivering out a prophecy concerning him, and which he might have an opportunity of sending to him:

*and to his multitude*; the multitude of his subjects, of which he boasted, and in whom he trusted:

*whom art thou like in thy greatness?* look over all the records of time, and into all the empires, kingdoms, and states that have been; draw a comparison between thyself and the greatest potentate that ever was; fancy thyself to be equal to him; this will not secure thee from ruin and destruction; for as they have been humbled, and are fallen, so wilt thou be: pitch for instance on the Assyrian monarch, whose empire has been the most ancient, extensive, and flourishing, and yet now crushed; and as thou art like him in greatness, at least thou thinkest so, so thou art in pride, and wilt be in thine end; to assure of which is the drift of the following account of the king of Assyria.

**Ver. 3.** *Behold, the Assyrian was a cedar in Lebanon*, &c.] Here grew the tallest, most stately, broad and flourishing ones. This sense is, that he was as one of them; comparable to one, for his exaltation and dignity; for the largeness of his dominion, the flourishing circumstances of it, and its long duration; that empire having lasted from the times of Nimrod unto a few years of the present time; for this is to be understood, either of the monarchy itself, or of Esarhaddon; or rather of Chynilidanus, or Saracus, the last king of it. The Septuagint, and Arabic versions render it the “cypariss” in Lebanon; but not that, but the cedar, grew there, and which best suits the comparison:

*with fair branches*; meaning not children, nor nobles, nor subjects; but provinces, many and large, which were subject to this monarch:

*and with a shadowing shroud*; power, dominion, authority, a mighty army sufficient to protect all that were under his government, and subject to it:

*and of an high stature*: exalted above all the kings and kingdoms of the earth:

*and his top was among the thick boughs*; his kingly power, headship, and dominion, was over a multitude of petty princes and states, comparable to the thick boughs and branches of a tree: or, “among the clouds”; as the Septuagint and Arabic versions render it; above the heights of which the Assyrian monarch attempted to ascend, (<sup><23144></sup>Isaiah 14:14 <sup><27110></sup>Daniel 4:10-12).

**Ver. 4.** *The waters made him great, &c.*] The waters of the river Tigris, near to which stood the city of Nineveh, the metropolis of the Assyrian monarchy; the traffic brought by which river made it rich and great, and the whole empire, and the king of it:

*the deep set him up on high, with her rivers running round about his plants;* the vast trade by sea, the profits and commodities of which were conveyed through various rivers, which ran about the provinces of the empire, which were as plants in a field; and by which they were enriched, and the whole empire, and the king of it, were raised to a prodigious pitch of wealth and power:

*and sent out little rivers to all the trees of the field;* so that the common people, comparable to the trees of the field for their number and usefulness, all received profit and advantage hereby: or else by waters and the deep may be meant the multitude of people, as in (<sup>6675</sup> Revelation 17:15), which increased his kingdom, filled his provinces, supplied his colonies, and enlarged his power and riches. The Targum is,

“by the people he was multiplied; by his auxiliaries he became strong; he subjected kings under his government; and his governors he appointed over all the provinces of the earth.”

**Ver. 5.** *Therefore his height was exalted above all the trees of the field, &c.*] His majesty, grandeur, and glory, were advanced above all princes, nobles, and people; all ranks and degrees of men, let them be compared to trees taller or lower:

*and his boughs were multiplied, and his branches became long;* the provinces of his empire became more numerous, and were spread far and near, and reached to distant countries:

*because of the multitude of waters, when he shot forth;* either the vast number of people, which were daily increasing, and were sent out to people distant colonies, newly subdued or planted; or because of the great traffic which was carried on in different parts, and the advantages arising from it. The Targum is,

“therefore he was lifted up in his strength above all the kings of the earth, and his army was multiplied, and his auxiliaries prevailed over many people, through his victories”

**Ver. 6.** *All the fowls of the heavens made their nests in his boughs, &c.*] People from all parts of the world, under the whole heavens, flocked to his dominions, and settled themselves in one province or another; promising themselves protection, prosperity, and peace under his government:

*and under his branches did all the beasts of the field bring forth their young*; even people of a more savage disposition, being either conquered by him, and placed in his provinces; or coming thither of their own accord, took up their residence there, built houses, planted vineyards, married wives, begat children, and settled their families there:

*and under his shadow dwelt all great nations*; under his protection, care, and government, many large kingdoms and states were; yea, all were either subject to him, or sought to be his friends and allies: this explains the above figurative expressions. The Targum is,

“by his army he subdued all the strong towers; and under his governors he subjected all the provinces of the earth; and in the shadow of his kingdom dwelt all the numerous people.”

**Ver. 7.** *Thus was he fair in his greatness, &c.*] Amiable, lovely, delightful to look upon in the greatness of his majesty, in his royal glory and dignity:

*in the length of his branches*; in the extent of his empire, and the provinces of it:

*for his root was by great waters*; his kingdom was well established, firmly rooted among a multitude of people; from whom he had a large revenue to support his throne and government, and the dignity of it; by tribute, taxes, customs, and presents; and through the large trade and traffic of his subjects in different parts, from whence he received great profit and advantage. The Targum is,

“and he became victorious by his auxiliaries, by the multitude of his mighty ones, so that his terror was upon many people.”

**Ver. 8.** *The cedars in the garden of God could not hide him, &c.*] That is, could not rise so high as this cedar, and overtop him, and obscure his glory; even those that were most excellent, which grew in Eden, near to which Babylon stood, and where a mighty king dwelt. The sense is, that the greatest kings and potentates in the whole world, which is like a garden

planted by the Lord, were not equal to the king of Assyria, and much less exceeded him in grandeur, wealth, and power:

*the fir trees were not like his boughs*: lesser kings and princes, comparable to fir trees for the beauty, regularity, order, and flourishing condition of their kingdoms; yet these were but petty states, and not to be compared even with the provinces of the king of Assyria:

*and the chesnut trees were not like his branches*; lesser states still: which, though well set, and well spread, and full of people, yet not answerable to some countries that were in the provinces that belonged to the Assyrian empire:

*not any tree in the garden of God was like unto him in his beauty*; no king, prince, or potentate whatever in the whole world, was to be compared to him for royal majesty and greatness. The Targum is,

“mighty kings could not prevail against him, because of the strength of his power, which he had from the Lord; rulers could not stand before his army, and mighty men could not prevail against his auxiliaries, because of the strength of power he had from the Lord; there is none like to him in his strength.”

**Ver. 9.** *I have made him fair by the multitude of his branches, &c.*] Or provinces, the extensiveness of his dominions: all his power and strength, riches and wealth, grandeur and glory, and the vast dominions he was possessed of, were all from the Lord; as whatever kings have are, though they are too apt to ascribe it to themselves; but all are from him, by whom kings reign:

*so that all the trees of Eden, that were in the garden of God, envied him*; all the kings of the earth, though they dared not openly speak against him, or oppose him; yet they inwardly grieved at and secretly grudged his grandeur and majesty, superior to theirs, and wished themselves in his stead; and could gladly have done anything, were it in their power, to eclipse his glory, and bring him lower. This is the case of all that are in any eminence, or are conspicuous to others, or in any exalted station above others, be it what it will; whether they have superior gifts and endowments of mind; or greater riches, and larger possessions; or are in high places of honour, trust, and profit. The Targum is,

“I have made him beautiful by the multitude of his mighty ones; and all the kings of the east trembled before him, because of the strength of his power, which he had from the Lord.”

**Ver. 10.** *Therefore thus saith the Lord God, &c.*] Having described the greatness of the Assyrian monarch; now follows the account of his fall, and the cause of it, pride:

*because thou hast lifted up thyself in height*; this is either an address to Pharaoh king of Egypt, who, though he did not rise up so high as the Assyrian monarch in glory and grandeur; yet he lifted up himself, and thought himself superior to any; which reason he must be brought down: or the words are directed to the Assyrian monarch, by a change of person frequent in Scripture; who, though he was raised by the Lord to the height of honour and dignity he was, yet ascribed it to himself:

*and he hath shot up his top among the thick boughs*; the multitude of provinces over which he became head and governor; (see Gill on “<sup>23108</sup>Ezekiel 31:3”):

*and his heart is lifted up in his height*; with pride, insolence, and contempt of God and men; of which see the instances in (<sup>23108</sup>Isaiah 10:8-15 36:18-20 37:10-13).

**Ver. 11.** *I have therefore delivered him into the hand of the mighty one of the Heathen, &c.*] Or, into the hand of the mightiest of the nations<sup>f562</sup>; the mightiest prince among them. Some understand this of Arbaces the Mede, by whom Sardanapalus had been defeated long before this time: others of Merodachbaladan king Babylon, by whom Esarhaddon the Assyrian monarch was vanquished; or rather Nebuchadnezzar, who was called Nabopolassar; who, in the first year<sup>f563</sup> of his reign, in conjunction with Cyaxares king of Media, took Nineveh, the metropolis of the Assyrian monarchy; and this was by the appointment of God, and under the direction of his providence, and through the success he gave to the arms of these princes, according to his own decrees and prophecies. Some render it, “into the hand of the god of the nations”<sup>f564</sup>; yet meaning either Cyaxares or Nebuchadnezzar; so called because of their great power and might, and which they had from the Lord:

*he shall surely deal with him*; or, “in doing he shall do to him”<sup>f565</sup>; he shall do with him as he pleases he shall easily manage him, though so powerful;

and deal with him according to his deserts; or, as the Targum, he shall take vengeance on him, as he did:

*I have driven him out for his wickedness*; out of his court and palace; out of his royal city Nineveh; out of his kingdom and dominions; and he shall reside and reign no more there; and all this for his wickedness, pride, and oppression, and other sins: when God strips men of their honour, riches, power, and dominion, it is because of their abuse of them; for some sin, or sins, or wickedness they have been guilty of, both against him and men; and therefore it is but just and righteous in him to dethrone such princes, and drive them from their seats.

**Ver. 12.** *And strangers, the terrible of the nations, have cut him off, &c.]*

Cut off the boughs and branches of this cedar, and cut him down to the ground; that is, utterly destroyed him, his empire and monarchy: these “strangers” were the Medes, who lived in a country distant from Assyria; and “the terrible of the nations”, the cruel and merciless Chaldeans, the soldiers of the king of Babylon’s army; (see <sup>251</sup>Ezekiel 30:11):

*and have left him upon the mountains*, like a tree cut down there, and its boughs and branches lopped off, which roll down from thence into the valleys, and by the rivers of water signifying his depression from a high and exalted state to a very low one, as follows:

*and in all the valley his branches are fallen, and his boughs are broken by all the rivers of the land*; signifying that many provinces and countries under his dominion were broken off, and by force taken away from him; or they broke off and revolted of themselves, and either set up for themselves, and recovered their former power and authority; or gave up themselves to the conqueror. The Targum is,

“and in all valleys his army fell, and his auxiliaries were scattered by all the rivers of the land.”

*and all the people of the earth are gone down from his shadow, and have left him*: those that joined themselves to his empire, put themselves under his protection, or sought his friendship and alliance, now withdrew themselves from him, and left him alone to shift for himself; as frightened birds and beasts will do, when a tree is cut down and fallen, in the boughs or under the shadow of which they dwelt. The Targum paraphrases it,

“from the shadow of his kingdom.”

**Ver. 13.** *Upon his ruin shall all the fowls of the heaven remain, &c.]* Or, “on his fall”<sup>f566</sup>; the fall of this tree: and all the beasts of the field shall be upon his branches as when a tree is cut down, and its lopped off branches and boughs lie here and there, either the birds and beasts that before dwelt in it or under it, though for a while frightened away, return unto it; or others come: the birds come and sit upon the boughs, and pick up what they can find on them; and the beasts browse upon the branches: this may signify that even those people who before put themselves under the protection of this monarch, or sought alliance with him, now preyed upon his dominions; or the Medes and Babylonians, the conquerors, seized on the provinces of the empire, and plundered them of their riches, The Targum understands it literally of the fowls of the heaven, and the beasts of the field, feeding upon the carcasses of the slain; which is no bad sense of the passage; thus,

“upon the fall of his slain all the fowls of heaven have dwelt, and upon the carcasses of his army all the beasts of the field have rested.”

**Ver. 14.** *To the end that none of all the trees by the waters exalt themselves for their height, &c.]* The end proposed by the Lord in the destruction of the king of Assyria, and the use to be made of it, is this; that the kings of the earth take warning hereby, who rule over a multitude of people, comparable to waters, and who abound in riches and wealth; that they are not elated with pride and vanity, because of their exalted estate, their grandeur, and dignity; and do not behave insolently against God, on whom they depend; nor haughtily and in an oppressive manner towards their own subjects, over whom they rule:

*neither shoot up their top among the thick boughs;* affect universal monarchy, as he did; and set up themselves over all kingdoms and states, as he had over them, and make all subject to them:

*neither their trees stand up in their height, that drink water;* that is, kings and potentates, who rule over the people, and are supplied and supported by them in their exalted stations, by the tribute and taxes they pay them and so abound in riches and power, should not trust in the height of honour and power they are raised to, and treat contemptuously God and man; but consider what they are, that they are but men, and are in slippery places, where there is no standing long, and especially when death comes, as follows:



*for they are delivered unto death in the nether parts of the earth*; they are mortal by nature, as other men; they are appointed to die, and will be delivered into the hands of death, when the time is come, who will not spare them because of their crowns and sceptres; and when they will be laid in the grave, in the lowest parts of the earth, who used to sit upon elevated thrones of state:

*in the midst of the children of men, with those that go down to the pit*; the grave, where they are upon a level with the poorest and meanest of their subjects. The Targum is,

“that all the kings of the east might not be lifted up with their strength, nor exercise tyranny over the kingdoms; nor all that hold a kingdom lift up themselves in their own strength, for all are delivered unto death, &c.”

**Ver. 15.** *Thus saith the Lord God, in the day when he went down to the grave, &c.*] The Assyrian monarch; when his monarchy was destroyed, and he ceased to be king, and was stripped of all his majesty, power, and authority, and was as one dead, and laid in the grave, and buried:

*I caused a mourning*: that is, for him, in the waters, and among the trees, among the people and the kings of the earth, as follows:

*I covered the deep for him*; with mourning, with thick darkness, which set him up on high (<sup>25104</sup>Ezekiel 31:4):

*and I restrained the floods thereof, and the great waters were stayed*; which made him great, (<sup>25104</sup>Ezekiel 31:4), signifying by all this that the kingdoms of the world, comparable to the sea, of which his monarchy consisted, and all the inhabitants and people of them, comparable to floods and great waters, were affected with the fall of this great monarch, and thrown into consternation by it; not knowing what the event of things would be, stood still, and knew not what course to take; all business was stopped, especially all traffic by sea, and all trade and commerce every where; a stagnation of everything for a while:

*and I caused Lebanon to mourn for him*; where he was a cedar, (<sup>25103</sup>Ezekiel 31:3), this may respect the whole empire he was head of, particularly the kingdom of Syria, on the borders of which Lebanon was; and was a part of the Assyrian empire, which must mourn and be concerned at the fall of it:

*and all the trees of the field fainted for him:* all the kings of the earth that were in alliance with him, or subject to him, trembled for fear that their destruction would be next; or as doubtful and concerned what would be their condition, under the yoke of another. The Targum is,

“tribulation covered the world, and the provinces were forsaken, and many people trembled, and all the kings of the people smote the shoulder because of him.”

**Ver. 16.** *I made the nations to shake at the sound of his fall, &c.]* As, when a large cedar was cut down and fell in Lebanon, the noise of it was heard at a distance; so when this mighty monarch and monarchy fell, the nations of the world, and the kings of them, heard of it far and near, and shook through fear of what would be the consequence, lest they should fall also in like manner:

*when I cast him down to hell,* or “the grave”,

*with them that descend into the pit;* in common with other men that die, and are buried: it may refer to his subjects and soldiers that perished with him, who were slain by the sword, and were buried with him, and he with them; no distinction being made between them:

*and all the trees of Eden, the choice and best of Lebanon, all that drink water;* the greatest kings and potentates of the world, the chief and principal of the Assyrian empire; all that ruled over multitudes of people, and partook of their wealth and riches, and were supported in grandeur and dignity; who had been in the state of the dead before this time:

*shall be comforted in the nether parts of the earth;* when they see so mighty a monarch depressed, and brought as low as they, into the same state of meanness and contempt; as it is some kind of solace for persons in distress to have partners with them: this is a poetic expression, representing the dead as rejoicing to see others in the same condition with themselves. The Targum is,

“all the kings of the east, the governors, and those that are rich in substance, all that hold a kingdom, are comforted in the lower part of the earth.”

**Ver. 17.** *They also went down to hell with him, &c.]* To the grave with him; many of his nobles, princes, generals, soldiers, and subjects:

*unto them that be slain with the sword*; to be buried and lie with them who had fallen by the sword, as a just punishment for their iniquities:

*and they that were his arm*; either that leaned on his arm, were dependents upon him; or his ministers, his instruments, whom he employed under him as his deputies, to govern the several provinces that belonged to him; or rather his allies and auxiliaries, who helped and assisted him on occasion:

*that dwelt under his shadow in the midst of the Heathen*; in the midst of the nations subject to the Assyrian empire; such who put themselves under the protection of it, lived comfortably under it, and continued with it to the last; these shared the same fate as that did. The Targum is,

“his governors are broken, whom he strengthened in the midst of the kingdom.”

**Ver. 18.** *To whom art thou thus like in glory and in greatness among the trees of Eden?* &c.] Among all the kings and potentates of the earth; pitch on whom you will, say which of them all, even the greatest of them for majesty and glory, for wealth and riches, power and authority, and extent of dominion, you are equal to; name the king of Assyria, if you please, before described, though you are not equal to him; and if you were, this would not secure you from ruin; since, as great as he was, he fell, and so will you: this is said to Pharaoh king of Egypt, and is an application of the preceding parable to him; suggesting, that let him be as high as any ever was, or he could imagine himself to be:

*yet shall thou be brought down with the trees of Eden unto the nether parts of the earth*; the grave, and lie in the same depressed and humble state as the greatest monarchs that ever were on earth do:

*thou shalt lie in the midst of the uncircumcised*; the wicked, as the Targum; the uncircumcised in heart; who belong not to God, or his people, and have no communion with either, but are shut out of the kingdom of heaven, and have their portion with devils and damned spirits:

*with them that be slain by the sword*; in a way of judgment for their sins:

*this is Pharaoh, and all his multitude, saith the Lord God*; this account represents Pharaoh, his grandeur, his pride, and his ruin; this shows what will be the end of him, and of his numerous subjects. The Septuagint and Arabic versions render it, “so will be Pharaoh”, &c. in like manner will he

fall, and all his people with him; for the Lord God has said it, and it shall assuredly come to pass. The Targum is,

“to whom art thou like now in glory and greatness among the kings of the east? and thou shall be brought down with the kings of the east into the lower part of the earth; in the midst of sinners thou shalt sleep, with those that are slain by the sword; this is Pharaoh, and all his multitude, saith the Lord God.”