## Part Four: Yahweh’s Messages to Ezekiel, Year Nine (24:1–33:20)

Ezek 24:1–2 introduces Part Four of the scroll, which holds its readers in suspense and marks time, in two ways (Skinner, 215). First, it announces the beginning of the siege of Jerusalem that Yahweh has been threatening—but only the beginning. The siege will last eighteen months. Even after that, some time will elapse before news of the city’s fall reaches Kebar (33:21). In the date specified in 24:1, then, Ezekiel is to announce the siege to his people, but they will then live in suspense through that period, though in nothing like the Jerusalemites’ own suspense. And this eighteen-month period does not actually cover everything to which 24:1–33:20 refers: see, e.g., 25:3–4; 29:1, 17; 32:1. A related unique feature of Part Four is its incorporating not just one date, at the beginning, but a series of dates. The sequence of references to years nine, eleven, ten, eleven, eleven, twelve, twelve in Ezek 24; 26; 29; 30; 31; and 32 helps maintain the suspense between the beginning of the siege and the end, even though 29:17–21 alone would make clear that the end has long has happened by the time these chapters were put together.

The second suspense feature is the incorporation at this point in the scroll of a series of messages that do not directly concern Israel. They relate to Israel’s neighbors who will be implicated in what happens as Nebuchadrezzar pursues his aims in the region, to Tyre as the big mercantile power in the region, and to Egypt as the big military power apart from Babylon. That description of Tyre and Egypt also hints at why these chapter include no threat of trouble for Babylon itself. While Ezekiel doesn’t quite say that Nebuchadrezzar acts as Yahweh’s servant (see Jer 25:9; 27:6), he does say that the Babylonians were engaged in “service” in which “they acted for me” and that Nebuchadrezzar thus “served” Yahweh (29:18, 20) (Blenkinsopp, 126), in connection with his siege of Tyre and his coming invasion of Egypt. The Babylonians will also be Yahweh’s agents in implementing the other threats in these chapters. While their own time will come, as 21:28–32 [33–37] has already declared, it’s not the point here. No doubt it would do Ezekiel and the Kebarites no harm in their relationship with the Babylonian authorities if Ezekiel preaches in a way that supports Babylonian political and military policy, though prophets like Ezekiel (or Amos or Micah or Jeremiah) don’t generally seem to focus on preaching what would be politically safe messages. And Ezekiel has other subtle ways of speaking polemically about Babylon.[[1]](#footnote-2)

Wright (255–72) suggests that three themes emerge from the messages about the other nations. First, Yahweh is sovereign in the ebb and flow of international affairs, he exercises that sovereignty in a way centering on Israel as his people, but he exercises it is a way that presupposes a moral consistency about his dealings with Israel and with the rest of the nations. Second, all human power and glory (political, military, and economic) are transient, and thus all empires are transient. Third, the goal of all Yahweh’s action is that the nations should acknowledge him, though there is some ambiguity over whether that acknowledging/knowing will mean a kind of personal relationship—because Ezekiel’s focus lies on the honoring of Yahweh.

Part Four unfolds as follows.

**24:1–25:17** Messages relating to the siege, to how people are to expect to react to the city’s coming fall, and to Israel’s neighbors in that context (year nine)

The news about the siege (24:1–14)

The portent of Ezekiel’s bereavement (24:15–27)

The declarations about Ammon, Moab and Seir, Edom, and Philistia (25:1–17)

Ezek 24–25 thus comprises three messages, each with its own introduction, “Yahweh’s message came to me,” after which a new date and introduction mark off Ezek 26–28. In Ezek 24–25, the first message is dated by the beginning of the siege, “this very day,” while the second has in prospect the city’s actual fall on “that day.” These two separate message are given a link through this juxtaposition, and one could see them as offering two signs of the city’s fall (Pohlmann, 1:350). In turn, reference in the second message (24:21) to treating “my sanctuary” as ordinary recurs in the third (25:3). These two separate messages in 24:15–27 and 25:1–17 are thus in turn given a link through the juxtaposition.

While the date in 24:1–2 introduces Part Four as a whole and compares with 1:1–3; 8:1; and 20:1, one might also see it as composed with Ezek 24–25 in particular in mind. The sequence of messages in Ezek 24–25 frames the period that now begins, as they relate to the initiating of the siege, the city’s prospective fall, and the aftermath of that event. Further, while they open Ezek 24–32 and thus open the second half of the scroll, they also pair with the opening of the actual messages in the first half of the scroll, in Ezek 4–5 (see Joyce, 165). So one might see them as looking both ways.

The sequence of neighbors in 25:1–17 compares with that in Jer 27:2–4, which refers to Edom, Moab, Ammon, Tyre, and Sidon (Sweeney, 126). The implication may be that these are the nations around Judah that resist Babylon, like Judah and in collaboration with Judah—though Ezekiel does not make the point.

**26:1–28:26** Messages about Tyre (year eleven)

The messages about Tyre begin with another date and then comprise a threat and a requiem relating to the city-state itself, then a threat and a requiem relating to its ruler, and then brief threats and promises relating to Sodom and to Israel. Tyre (with Sidon) is the remaining rebel against Babylon, of the ones named in Jer 27:3. It is also the most significant of the peoples named there, for reasons that become clear in the messages about it. It relates to Tyre’s importance as an economic power. The chapters unfold:

threats for Tyre (26:1–21)

a requiem for Tyre (27:1–36)

a threat for the leader of Tyre (28:1–10)

a requiem for the king of Tyre (28:11–19)

a threat for Sidon and promises for Israel (28:20–26)

Part of the extra-scriptural background of messages that declare the downfall of other peoples (often termed “oracles against the nations”) is that they serve to back up military action against the peoples who are their subjects. Perhaps they featured that way in Israel, but it’s not clear that this is the case with this kind of prophetic message within the First Testament itself. It’s more plausible to think of the prophets as using the form of such prophetic messages to make a different point. With the Tyre messages, there is no question of military engagement between Judah and Tyre. If there is to be military engagement, it will involve Babylon, not Judah, and Tyre’s downfall will bring Judah no gain. The focus lies on Tyre’s satisfaction at Jerusalem’s calamity, at the possibly tragic inevitability of the fall of such a successful trading people, and at the presumption of its ruler.

**29:1–32:32** Messages about Egypt (years ten, eleven, twelve, and twenty-seven)

Tyre and Egypt were both great powers, but in different senses. Like Tyre, Egypt was an economic power, but it was also a political and military one. And while Tyre’s economic activity was significant for Israel (27:17), Egypt’s political and military power was more important. Thus, while Tyre’s downfall needed to happen for theological reasons (28:2), Egypt’s downfall needed to happen both for similar theological reasons (29:3, 10) and for reasons to do with its significance for Israel. That explicitly consisted in Israel’s longstanding inclination to look for support and help from Egypt, but in the background of any discussion of Egypt lies the much longer history of the relationship that goes back to the beginning Israel’s story in Egypt. Only Genesis, Exodus, Deuteronomy, and Jeremiah refer to Egypt more often than Ezekiel (and those other books are all about people who lived there).

The chapters unfold:

year ten: a message about Pharaoh and Egypt (29:1–16)

year twenty-seven (!): a message about Nebuchadrezzar and Egypt (29:17–21)

a message comprising a wail over Egypt and its allies (30:1–19)

year eleven: a message about Pharaoh and Egypt (30:20–26)

year eleven: a message about Pharaoh and Egypt (31:1–18)

year twelve: a message comprising a requiem over Pharaoh and Egypt (32:1–16)

year twelve: a message comprising a wail over Egypt (32:17–32)

Six of the seven messages, the sections beginning, “Yahweh’s message came to me,” thus also begin with a date (the lack of a date in 30:1–19 makes for a link with the preceding dated message). This concentration of dates is unique in the Ezekiel scroll, which elsewhere uses dates more to mark transitions between substantial sequences of chapters. This sequence of seven sections parallels other sequences of seven, but Ezekiel does not draw attention to this fact and it may be chance (see further the “Outline” to 25:1–17).

Whereas it is perhaps surprising that the Tyre messages refer only once, in 26:6, to the aim that Tyre may acknowledge Yahweh, and all the more surprising in light of 28:22, 23, 24, and 26, it is now noteworthy that this aim recurs in 29:6, 9, 16, 21; 30:8, 19, 25, 26; 32:15.

**33:1–20:** Messages relating to the coming fall of the city

“From the point of view of the literary structure of the book, chapter 33 carries the reader back to the events recorded in Ezekiel 24. The chapters that intervene, dealing as they do with the destiny of non-Israelite peoples, establish a kind of pause.… It is as if the reader is given time to reflect deeply about the import and its meaning for the nations of all that has been said and written up to the time when Jerusalem faces its most severe threat” (Clements, 150–51). Now the scroll takes us back to the context of 24:1–25:17, as in the arrangement of the scroll and in chronology the siege is about the come to an end and city is about to fall. In that context it takes up two concrete themes from earlier in the scroll and thus reaffirms their importance at this point when the city is about to fall, and for people subsequently listening to Ezekiel or reading his messages. One is Ezekiel’s responsibility as lookout and the people’s responsibility to pay heed to him (33:1–9). The other is the people’s challenge even now to turn to Yahweh, knowing that Yahweh will respond (33:10–20).

## The News About the Siege (24:1–14)

### Outline

The section’s date marks its significance, but the message it introduces restates themes from Ezek 1–23 and doesn’t say anything new. In the background is the fact that Yahweh has been working by means of Ezekiel in the same way as he has been working by means of Jeremiah (though in a narrower time frame) in requiring him to keep giving his people the same message and laying himself open to being chided for repeating a message that never comes true. While the message may be the same here, however, if the blockade of Jerusalem has begun and if the Kebarites believe Ezekiel’s announcement about it and if his announcement gets confirmed shortly when people arrive from Jerusalem with news, then the dynamics of the situation have changed.

No, Ezekiel says nothing new. The news will simply provide more reason to believe it. “Although another chapter of judgment seems redundant,” Ezekiel again puts the spotlight on the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple. “It is now ‘The End.’ The curtain drops, not on thunderous grief, but on the silent expectation of a new drama” (Bowen, 145). Once again, then, Ezekiel gives a report of a message from Yahweh about Jerusalem, a message to be passed on to the “rebellious household” in Kebar. The bulk of the report is another parable,\* another מָשָׁל, about Jerusalem, this time about the city resembling a cooking pot with meat inside. When Ezekiel starts relating the parable in 24:3b–5 (without the introduction in 24:1–3a that appears in the recorded version), it would simply suggest a chef preparing a celebratory meal. The hearers might guess that the pot stands for Jerusalem, but otherwise one can imagine them again asking themselves why this prophet is telling his stories. Stage two of the parable in 24:6–8 confirms that it refers to “the city,” reveals that the pot and its contents are much less pleasant than 24:3b–5 suggested, and indicates that this barbecue is not going to be the kind of event that people thought it was going to be. In turn, 24:9–12 takes the parable yet further in terms of what will happen to the pot and its meat. And 24:13–14 abandons the parable altogether to put in straight terms what Yahweh intends to do with the city. Thus the message begins with bare parable and ends with bare threat, and interweaves parable and threat in between.

The section thus unfolds:

Introduction with date (24:1–3a)

A parable about Jerusalem and a declaration about its fate (24:3b–14)

The Lord Yahweh has said this

The bare parable: instructions to a chef (24:3b–5)

therefore the Lord Yahweh has said this

interpretation, stage one (24:6–8)

therefore the Lord Yahweh has said this

interpretation, stage two (24:9–12)

The bare threat: the fate of Jerusalem (24:13–14)

I Yahweh have spoken

Given that the section as a whole says nothing novel but simply provides another vivid description of the reality facing the city that the Kebarites need to understand, the parable and its explanation could have fitted any point in the scroll so far, but its timing gives it distinctive force. And it is noteworthy that in the introduction Yahweh calls his people the “rebellious household” for the last of fourteen times (a variant expression will occur in 44:6). The medieval chapter division treats 24:1–14 and 15–27 as one unit, but their introductions mark them as separate messages, though through their juxtaposition they speak to each other. It is also possible to see 24:1–14 as two prophecies (24:3b–5 and 6–14) that have been combined and given a preamble (24:1–3a) (Clements, 110–11; Zimmerli, 1:497 suggests a more complex understanding of the history of the section).

### Translation

1Yahweh’s message came to me in the ninth year, in the tenth month, on the tenth of the month: 2My man, write down[[2]](#footnote-3) for yourself the name of the day, this very day[[3]](#footnote-4)—the king of Babylon has laid siege to[[4]](#footnote-5) Jerusalem this very day. 3And pronounce a parable[[5]](#footnote-6) to the rebellious household. Say to them, The Lord Yahweh has said this.

Put the pot on, put it on,

and yes, pour water in it.

4Collect its pieces into it,

every good piece.

Thigh and shoulder,

the choicest of the bones, fill it.

5The choicest of the flock, get it,[[6]](#footnote-7)

and yes, circle the bones at the bottom of it.[[7]](#footnote-8)

Set about preparing them,[[8]](#footnote-9)

yes, its bones have cooked inside it.

6Therefore the Lord Yahweh has said this.

Oh,[[9]](#footnote-10) the bloodshed city,

a pot whose scum[[10]](#footnote-11) is in it,

yes, whose scum has not got out from it.

Piece by piece[[11]](#footnote-12) get it out,

no lot has fallen on it.

7Because its blood, it has been inside it,

on the glare of rock it set it.

It did not pour it on the earth

to cover over it with dirt.

8To arouse wrath,

to take redress,

I put its blood on the glare of rock

to avoid covering.

9Therefore the Lord Yahweh has said this.

Oh, the bloodshed city,

I, too, will make a big circle,[[12]](#footnote-13)

10Get plenty of wood,

inflame[[13]](#footnote-14) the fire,

Finish off the meat,

and stir the mixture pan,[[14]](#footnote-15)

And the bones, they should scorch,[[15]](#footnote-16)

11and stand it on its coals, empty,

In order that it may get hot,

and the copper will glow,

And its defilement melt inside it,

its scum may finish off,

12Though it has wearied efforts,[[16]](#footnote-17)

and it would not get out of it,

Its vast scum,[[17]](#footnote-18)

its scum in fire.

13With your defilement in its willfulness[[18]](#footnote-19)—since I would have cleansed you,[[19]](#footnote-20)

but you did not get clean from your defilement,[[20]](#footnote-21)

You will not get clean again

until I have settled my fury upon you.

14I Yahweh have spoken. It is coming[[21]](#footnote-22) and I will do it. I will not refraining and I will not spare and I will not relen, as in accordance with your paths and with your deeds they are ruling for you (an affirmation of the Lord Yahweh).

### Textual Notes

MT has markers\* after 24:5, 8, and 14.

**24:2** For **“**writedown**,”** Q has the explicitly impv. כְּתָב, K the fuller spelling כתוב which could be either impv. or inf. abs. used imperativally.

**24:3** LXX has only one “put on.”

**24:5** For דּוּר (“circle”), LXX “burn” looks like an alternative guess (cf. 24:9–10), as does EVV “pile.” Ewald (129) emends “bones” (הָעֲצָמׅים) to “logs” (הָעֵצׅים) which makes good sense on the basis of translating “pile up below” (cf. NRSV), though LXX and Vg. also have “bones.” NIV paraphrases “pile wood beneath it for the bones.”

For רַתַּח רְתָחֶיהָ, “set about preparing them” (see the translation footnote), LXX has a repeated finite verb.

**24:7** LXX has first-person verbs in the middle cola, assimilating to 24:8.

For בָּשְׁלוּ NIV’s impv. “cook” (cf. NRSV) implies a form such as בַּשַּׁל.

**24:10** LXX again has first-person verbs in 24:10a, assimilating to 24:9.

For הָעֵצׅים, “wood,” Vg. “bones” implies הָעֲצָמׅים.

For the rare מֶרְקְחָה LXX has “broth” and lacks “and the bones should scorch.”

**24:12** LXX lacks 24:12a.

For תְּאֻנּׅים הֶלְאת, NRSV “In vain I have wearied myself” implies הׅנָּם נׅלְאֵתׅי (see Allen, 2:55).

For בְּאֵשׁ “in fire,” LXX “be shamed” implies בּוֹשׁ.

**24:14** For שְׁפָטוּךָ, “they are ruling,” LXX, Vg. “I will judge you” implies שְׁפַטְתּׅיךָ, as 7:3, 8 (*HUB*). LXX also has extra lines (from Theod., Jerome says, 269), reworking further familiar phrases: “Therefore I will judge you in accordance with your bloodshed, and in accordance with your notions I will judge you, defiled one, well-known one and abundant in embittering” (Allen, 2:55, reconstructs a Heb. text).

### Verse-by-Verse Commentary

**24:1–3a** Ezekiel uses various date formulations, and this one differs from others in putting the phrase “Yahweh’s message came to me” first. The date corresponds to the one in 2 Kgs 25:1 and suggests that Ezekiel refers to the ninth (full) year of Zedekiah’s reign, working by the common dating system, rather than the ninth year since the Kebarites’ removal from Jerusalem, Ezekiel’s usual dating system—it would be the tenth year on that way of counting (Rashi, in MG; cf. Block, 1:772–73).[[22]](#footnote-23) Three more years have therefore passed since 20:1 and the year is now 587. The significance of the preceding dates in 1:1; 8:1; 20:1 lay in them simply being moments when Yahweh chose to reveal himself or speak to Ezekiel. In 24:1 there is the further significance in the date as a historical moment as well as the moment of Yahweh’s speaking. And when information about the blockade reaches Kebar via some arrival from Jerusalem, recording the date would provide evidence that people should accept Ezekiel’s account of the significance of the blockade and of what will follow. Hence Yahweh’s emphasis: “the day’s name… this very day… this very day.”

**24:3b–5** Ezekiel relates how Yahweh has issued some instructions to a chef, as if the chef were preparing a huge stew for a family or a community. Ezekiel doesn’t say that Yahweh told him to undertake the cooking, as he told him to take the actions in 4:1–5:3. The implication of 24:1–2 would rather be that the cook is Nebuchadrezzar and that he is already implementing this commission—unwittingly, as usual. But if Ezekiel speaks out the parable without this introduction, it does not identify the chef. It just invites people to imagine someone bidden to put a pot on the fire with water, and to get the best possible cuts of mutton or goat, and to let the less meaty bones cook along with the meaty cuts to add flavor. ““Polly put the kettle on,” says the children’s nursery song (Taylor, 175). But this meal is going to be no ordinary one—more like a meal for a great celebration.

The sequence of instructions in 24:3b–4 thus makes sense as a lead in to an eventual exhortation to cook. Then in 24:5a the sequence starts again, and subsequently the *qatal* verb in the last colon in 24:5b presupposes that the cooking has happened, so that 24:5bβ doesn’t follow from 24:5bα. As a whole, then, the voice in 21:4–5 is repetitive and things don’t come in a logical order, or it speaks jumpily (one can imagine the chef telling the voice to shut up so as to be allowed to get on with the job uninterrupted).

What might people think is Ezekiel’s reason for painting this picture? On another occasion, Yahweh reminded Ezekiel and Ezekiel reminded the Kebarites that the Jerusalem leaders speak of the city as like a pot: They might be the meat in it, kept secure from insects or animals, or the good meat in the pot as opposed to the scraps thrown to the animals. It might be a saying (11:3). In the present context, the audience might recall how people come into a city when an invasion is threatened because there should be safety there (cf. 22:19–22 with the verse-by-verse commentary; and Qimhi, in MG). Or the good meat might be the warriors (Tg., Rashi, in MG). Whereas being in a cooking pot might seem a threatening fate, that was not the implication of the thinking in 11:1–12, and Ezekiel had said that they were going to be taken out of the pot (11:7).

**24:6** Like other “therefores” in Ezekiel, the “therefore” does not link directly with what immediately follows, as can happen in English with words such as “thus” and “then.” It marks a connection, but what immediately follows is not a consequence but a piece of background to the statement of consequence that will eventually come. As is the case with other “therefores” (e.g., 5:7; 13:8; 16:35; 20:27; 21:24), then, this one actually raises suspense: when will we get the content of the “therefore”? It will begin to come in 24:8, but it will come more systematically in the context of the resumptive “therefore” in 24:9–11. Okay, there was nothing wrong with the pot in 11:1–12, but there Yahweh’s comments about it followed on 10:2, so the context was threatening. Okay, there was nothing wrong with that pot, but what about the pot tilted from the north in Jer 1:13? Ezekiel’s audience might suspect that “something ominous is afoot” because they immediately think of other stewpots (Darr, on 24:1–14). Okay, everything in 24:3–5 was positive, but Ezekiel is now to dispute any positive implications the parable might seem to have (Block, 1: 769–71). “The place of protection became the place of danger” because “under the protecting pot God himself had kindled a fire” (Zimmerli, 1:500). That disposes of one of the two possible positive implications of the picture of the city as a pot with meat in it. It is not a place of safety. But Ezekiel has suggested a link with the other possible positive implication, that the people in Jerusalem are the good meat. Now he also disposes of that idea. Actually they are “scum” or rust or unpleasant encrustation or disease or contamination (the word’s precise meaning is uncertain).

The background to that fact lies in what Yahweh says meanwhile about the city that the pot symbolizes: “therefore [in light of the fact that this pot stands for Jerusalem].…” He is not addressing the city, even rhetorically. The introduction to the parable has already indicated that, as usual, he is addressing “the rebellious household” in Kebar (24:3a), because they need to know what he is doing with Jerusalem. Jerusalem, he reminds them, is “the bloodshed city” (see 22:2) and it is now explicitly identified as the parable’s “pot.” Yahweh is not now simply abandoning the parable in favor of giving an interpretation of it, but adding to the parable while also interpreting it, as he will through 24:6–8. Ezekiel marks with a tricolon\* the significance of the move from a parable that might sound harmless to a parable-mixed-with-interpretation that begins in a way that ought to be shocking, “Oh, the bloodshed city.” The expression recurs from 22:2, but Ezekiel implicitly puts more emphasis here on the corporate effect of acts of bloodshed, on their effect on the city as an entity (Jenson, 200–1).

The double reference to scum (or rust or encrustation or disease or contamination) may suggest the omission of a stage in the preparation for cooking. The pot needs to be clean, but there is scum in it because it has not been scrubbed. So Yahweh issues another commission like the ones in 24:3b–5. The imperatives are singular as they were there, and the identity of the chef/dishwasher is still left unstated (but like other parables, this one has features that do not have any significance). Given the unusable state of the pot, the chef is to take the meat out, because “no lot has fallen on it.” While the lot falling can be bad news, as when the lot fell on Achan and identified him as a wrongdoer (Josh 7), it can be good news, as it should be when the lot falls on a piece of land for a family. When the lot falls on someone such as a priest or servant, it means it is their turn to serve. Here, the lot not falling might imply that none of this meat would be chosen by anyone who says, “I want that piece!” The pot’s contamination has inevitably affected all the meat in it. The city’s luck has run out (Joyce, 166), and “no lot has fallen on it so that some would perish and others be saved,” because a shared destruction fits a shared stain (Jerome, 270). When Jerusalem falls, It will be pure chance what happened to individuals (Qimhi, in MG).

**24:7** So Jerusalem is the bloodshed city and the pot is contaminated because “its blood has been inside it.” The “it” applies both to the pot in the parable and to the city that the parable symbolizes. The pot is full of meat from animals whose blood has not been drained. The city is stained by the blood of people who have been killed there, whose blood cries out for redress. It is wise to cover shed blood, in that it testifies to a life terminated, whether or not it was shed deliberately. But Jerusalem did the opposite. It exhibited the shed blood as publicly as possible, on a rock in open view. The scandal of shed blood is both ritual and moral.

**24:8** The opening “therefore” in 24:6 finds its interim fulfillment as Yahweh says what he intends to do, though his interim statement relates more directly to 24:7 and thus continues to provide background to the coming resumptive “therefore” in 24:9–11. Jerusalem did nothing about the blood that marked it and cried out for redress (24:7). Actually, it was not just because it didn’t wish to. This inaction suited Yahweh. He did not wish it to. It would have been inappropriate for Jerusalem to sidestep the consequences of its bloodshed. The blood needed to be allowed to continue to cry out (Gen 4:10; 2 Sam 21:10; Job 16:18; Isa 26:21; Rev 6:9–11; contrast Deut 21:1–9). Jerusalem set the blood on the glare of rock and avoided it being covered. And Yahweh also put it there to avoid it being covered, so that rather it would cry out for wrath and arouse wrath, cry out for redress and take redress. Alongside the personal reality of Jerusalem’s action, without the city realizing the significance of what it is (not) doing, there is the reality of Yahweh’s action, and the reality of the forces of wrath and redress that are built into Yahweh’s world with a power and responsibility that is semi-independent of him but can do his work (or sometimes work against him).

**24:9–10** The “real” therefore now follows, with the brief resumptive protest about “the bloodshed city” summing up 24:6–8. Yahweh goes back to the parable. “Circle the bones,” he had bidden earlier (24:5). Now he intends to “make a big circle.” He could be speaking about the same sort of circle, a pile of meat, which chillingly stands for the people in the pot/city, or he could be speaking about the stack of wood to go underneath the pot to which the next line refers. Anyway, he wants the fire to flame high. Once again he is bidding his chef to get cooking, unless he himself now becomes the chef—as one could read 24:9–11. Either way, there is to be none of that “medium rare” nonsense. Actually, the cooking is designed to render the meal inedible. First, he is to “finish off” the meat. Second, he is then to “stir the mixture pan,” stir together the remains of the overcooking enterprise. “Mixture pan” (מֶרְקְבָחָה) looks like another word for the cooking pot (on its only other occurrence in Job 21:23, the word comes in parallel with the word for “pot”). This pan is then the “it” in 24:11. And third, “the bones should scorch.”

**24:11–12** When there’s nothing of the food left, the pan or pot is to stay on the fire so that it continues to get hotter and hotter and the heat can “finish off” the scum as it finished off the meat. The scum constitutes the pot’s (that is, the city’s) “defilement,” one of Ezekiel’s characteristic themes. The meat has defiled the pot. Yahweh again allows literal reality to insert itself into the parable. Defilement was a theme in Part Three of the scroll, and 24:1–14 sums up the implications of the theme (Häner, 247). The scum would not get out of the pot—Jerusalem has not been willing to abandon the causes of its defilement. Indeed, the pot is just scum—bloodshed city is just slag, just grunge (22:1–31). But now the scum is in the fire in the parable and in literal reality, Nebuchadrezzar is blockading bloodshed city.

**24:13** For the last verses Yahweh abandons the parable and speaks straight, as he restates things again. And rhetorically he now speaks to Jerusalem. “Defilement in willfulness” sums up much of 24:11–12. The city has got itself defiled, it has done so deliberately, and it has no intention of changing. Yahweh would have cleansed the city, but cleansing a person or a community is a two-sided operation, and Jerusalem did not feel a need of cleansing, thank you, or have any desire to give up getting defiled. Yahweh’s attempts at cleansing would include acts of chastisement (cf. Amos 4:6–11) and messages of challenge through prophets. But the city won’t use the eyes and ears that it has (12:2). So there will be no more progress in the direction of its getting clean except as a result of Yahweh settling his fury on the city (cf. 5:13; 16:42; 21:17). There has to be sprinkling with fire (10:2).

**24:14** The declarations “I Yahweh have spoken” and “I will do it” recur (cf. 17:24; 22:14), here with the intervening declaration about “it” (the settling of fury) coming. Yes, if the siege has begun, it provides evidence that Yahweh may really be making these declarations and issuing these threats. He offers a series of frightening further reinforcements of them, further interweaving the familiar and the novel and undergirding them by their familiarity and intensity in “the most emphatic affirmation of divine resolve in the book” (Block, 1: 781). “I will not refrain” (פָּרַע) or let go or let alone or hold back—a hapax meaning for this unusual verb. “I will not spare” (חוּס): Yahweh usually says his eye will not spare (e.g., 9:10). “I will not relent” (נָחַם niphal), an almost unparalleled formulation (see Jer 4:28). Thus “in accordance with your paths and your deeds” the Babylonians “are ruling for you.” In laying siege to the city, they are exercising the authority over Jerusalem’s fate that Yahweh has given them, or they are on the way to doing that as they move towards conquering the city (the verb is *qatal*).

### Biblical Theology Comments

There are two or three forces involved in what happens in the world. As far as cleansing is concerned, there is Yahweh’s action in speaking and acting. There is also his people’s action. If they do not respond to him, Yahweh’s purpose will not find fulfillment. Yahweh’s desire to cleanse and a congregation’s desire for cleansing need to come together. And Yahweh may eventually give up. Behind that, is his people’s insistence and flagrancy in its wrongdoing. There is Yahweh’s insistence in having that flagrant wrongdoing continue to be visible. And there are the forces of wrath and redress that are built into the world, which he can call on.

### Application and Devotional Implications

The shedding of blood does or can bring a stain that can hardly be removed. After the Sandy Hook school shooting in 2012, the school was demolished. A similar decision has been taken to demolish the Uvalde school that was the scene of a shooting in 2022. After a couple raped and murdered twelve women in a house in Gloucester, UK, in 1996, the city bought the house and demolished it. Sometimes, at least, a stain may be so wide and deep that demolition is the only possibility.

### Selected Bibliography

Gosse, Bernard. “Le temple dans le livre d’Ézéchiel en rapport à la rédaction des Livres des Rois.” *RB* 103 (1996): 40–47.

Gross, Carl D. “Who am I? and other puzzles in **Ezekiel** **24.”** *The Bible Translator* *Technical* *Papers* 54 (2003): 325–31.

Kilchör, Benjamin. “בשל—Das Essen ist bereit.” *ZAW* 125 (2013): 483–86.

## The Death of Ezekiel’s Wife (24:15–27)

### Outline

Ezekiel starts again with his regular introduction (24:15), but in its regularity it contrasts with the shocking form of the message that then comes to him. An aspect of its traumatic nature is that it focuses not on his wife’s actual death (24:16a) but on how he is to react to it (24:16b–17). And whereas that regular message introduction commonly leads into a bidding to tell his people what Yahweh has said (e.g., 20:2–3), though not necessarily then into an account of his doing so, here Yahweh does not bid him to pass the message on to them, but he does (24:18). That issues in their asking him what it all means (24:19). Over that he had left them in suspense. Perhaps Yahweh had left him in suspense. So either Yahweh now tells him and he tells them, or he now shares this further aspect to what Yahweh told him earlier (24:20). The death of his wife stands for the destruction of temple and city (24:21). Once again the focus doesn’t lie on the event itself, about which he says nothing very new, though he expresses it in a newly intense way. It lies on the reaction expected of them (24:22–24a), which will include their (at last) acknowledging Yahweh (24:24b).

Yahweh then leaps forward to the event, again speaking to Ezekiel himself with no bidding to pass on the message. Nevertheless, this further part of Yahweh’s communication with Ezekiel might be something Ezekiel shared with the Kebarites, and obviously it appears here on the assumption that he should share it with people reading this written version of the message. Yahweh continues to focus on the event that the death of Ezekiel’s wife signified rather than on her death (24:25–26). That is more striking in that he focuses more directly on what the city’s fall of means for Ezekiel than on what it means for his people. Yet indirectly, what it means for him is what it means for them (24:27), which explains the inclusion of this last part of the message.

Thus the section unfolds:

Ezekiel introduces Yahweh’s message (24:15)

Yahweh’s message about his wife and him (24:16–17)

Ezekiel describes what followed (24:18)

The people ask him about it (24:19)

Ezekiel introduces and relates Yahweh’s message about Jerusalem and them (24:20–24)

Ezekiel’s introduction (24:20)

What Yahweh intends to do (24:21)

How they are to react (24:22–24bα)

The result in their acknowledging Yahweh (24:24bβ)

Yahweh’s message about the fall of Jerusalem and its implication for him (24:25–27)

Yahweh’s message (24:25–27bα)

The result in their acknowledging Yahweh (24:27bβ)

### Translation

15Yahweh’s message came to me: 16My man, here am I, taking from you the thing that is delight to your eyes, with a blow. But you will not howl. You will not cry. Your tears will not come. 17Sigh, be quiet, not making mourning for the dead, fix your hat on,[[23]](#footnote-24) put your shoes[[24]](#footnote-25) on your feet, not covering over your moustache, and not eating people’s food.

18I spoke to the people in the morning and my wife died in the evening. And in the morning I did as I was commanded. 19The people said to me, “Won’t you tell us what these things mean for us, that you are acting [thus]?” 20I said to them, Yahweh’s message came to me: 21Say to Israel’s household, The Lord Yahweh has said this. Here am I, treating my sanctuary as ordinary, the thing that is the pride of your strength, the delight of your eyes, and the pity of your spirit,[[25]](#footnote-26) in that your sons and your daughters whom you abandoned will fall by the sword. 22And you will do as I have done,[[26]](#footnote-27) not covering over your moustache, not eating people’s bread, 23your hat on your heads, your shoes on your feet, not howling and not crying. But you will waste away because of your acts of waywardness and you will moan one to another. 24So Ezekiel will be a portent to you as you will do accordance with all that he has done, when it comes about. And you will acknowledge that I am the Lord Yahweh.

25And you, my man. On the day when I take their stronghold from them, the celebration of their splendor, the delight of their eyes, the uplifting of their spirit, their sons and their daughters, 26when on that day a survivor[[27]](#footnote-28) comes to you to bring the news to your ears, 27on that day your mouth will open to the survivor. You will speak. You will not be silent any more. You will be a portent to them. And they will acknowledge that I am Yahweh.

### Textual Notes

MT has markers\* after 24:24 and 27.

**24:16** LXX interprets “with a blow” (בְּמַגֵּפָה) to mean “in battle,” perhaps interpreting in light of the root אָגַף (*HUB*).

LXX lacks “your tears will not come.”

**24:17** For דֹּם מֵתּׅים, “be quiet for the dead,” LXX “of blood, of the waist” implies דָּם מָתְנַיׅם.

LXX has a “not” in connection with the hat (which it takes to be a plaiting of the hair) and shoes (though not in 24:23).

For עָטָה, “cover,” LXX has “be consoled” (so again in 24:22), perhaps “guessing” (Cooke, 276).

For אֲנָשׁׅים, “people’s,” Vg. “mourners” (cf. Tg., and again in 24:22) suggests אוֹנׅים (cf. Hos 9:4).

**24:18** LXX lacks “and my wife died,” which makes the order of events in this verse less puzzling. Actually LXX has no reference at all to Ezekiel’s wife. It speaks only of the temple.[[28]](#footnote-29)

**24:23** For וּנְהַמְתֶּם “and you will moan” (cf. Vg., Theod.), LXX “you will comfort” (cf. Sym.) implies וְנׅחַמְתֶּם.

### Verse-by-Verse Commentary

**24:15–16a** Yet another sign act follows, but this is one that Ezekiel enacts rather than describes. He doesn’t indicate the date, and chronologically it could have come from long before the news about the siege arrived, but dramatically it fits sometime between the beginning of the siege and its consummation. One might guess that Ezekiel’s wife suddenly got ill and died within hours—with infections and epidemics, that can happen. Or perhaps she was already ill and the revelation concerns the illness becoming fatal—a “blow” (ְּמַגֵּפָה) doesn’t have to be instant (2 Chr 21:18–20).[[29]](#footnote-30) One might further guess that she is about thirty like him, and that they had some children, and one might then wonder what happened to them.… But Ezekiel tells us nothing about all that, because for his readers, as for his original hearers, the point lies in what the sign act signified. Indeed, it lies more in how he was to act than in the event itself or in what was going on in his psyche (Clements, 112–13).[[30]](#footnote-31) Actually, “a delight to your eyes” (מַחְמַד עֵינֶיךָ) is not the obvious way to refer to someone’s wife. “Delight” nearly always refers to things, not people (e.g., 26:12; Pss 68:16 [17]; 106:24; Lam 1:10, 11). So Yahweh’s phrase does not obviously refer to Ezekiel’s wife, and might suggest an attitude to the temple—Yahweh could thus be trailering the explicit reference that will come to the temple later. But “a blow” normally refers to something like an epidemic that strikes people.

**24:16b–17** The prohibitions that follow likewise are ones that apply to mourning the loss of someone (perhaps even before it happens, to forestall it and urge Yahweh not to do it).[[31]](#footnote-32) Whatever the loss, Ezekiel is bidden to behave as if he is not affected by it. Yahweh’s commands presumably indicate what normal mourning might reasonably involve, a variant on the conventions in any culture. Any loss of someone might make one “howl” (סָפַד), but that would be especially true of suddenly losing your spouse. It could indeed make one “cry” (בָּכָה) bitterly. Yes “tears” (דּׅמְעָה) would come. Ezekiel is not to allow any of that, only silent sighing. He's to dress in the usual respectable way with his usual (priestly?) headgear, rather than going bareheaded with his hair hanging loose, and proper smart footwear, rather than being barefoot and going about disheveled, in sack, smeared with dirt. He’s not to put on the equivalent of a dark veil (see Mic 3:7). Not eating “people’s food” might mean food people brought to him as part of the community mourning observance. The passage doesn’t speak of any feelings he might have or of his being *unable* to mourn in the usual fashion—as if he feels inhibited for some reason. “He is *commanded* not to do so, as a sign-act—in fact, he not only refrains from mourning, but dresses up in festival clothes.”[[32]](#footnote-33)

**24:18–19** The significance of Yahweh’s message might not be obvious to Ezekiel or to people he shared it with. They could assume that it referred to mourning over a disaster rather than a death,[[33]](#footnote-34) and they wouldn’t exactly be wrong. Anyway, he shares the puzzling message with them, his wife dies that evening unexpectedly or expectedly, and next morning he does as he had been instructed. It turns out that “by such actions, Ezekiel becomes Israel, suffering with and for the nation, a phenomenon connecting Ezekiel to the servant in Isaiah 40–55, to Jeremiah, and to Hosea, who become the innocent victims of their own proclamation.”[[34]](#footnote-35) If this doesn’t drive them to turn to Yahweh, then nothing ever will (Wright, 217).

**24:20–21** The action Yahweh threatens in relation to the sanctuary is shocking in several ways. There is the fact that Yahweh himself intends to treat it as ordinary, to profane “my sanctuary,” by having it trampled by feet that do not revere it. There is the fact that this will affect the thing that is “the pride of your strength” (גְּאוֹן עֻזְּכֶם). In isolation, that phrase might more naturally describe the city than the temple. “Profaning” would suggest the temple, which is indeed the key to the people’s strength (because Yahweh lives there) and is thus an object of their pride, though temple and city come together in this connection in Psa 79:1 (Greenhill, 582), and Ezek 7:24 has grieved over Babylonians in the city as well as in the temple. In yet other contexts, the phrase might suggest temple or city as mistakenly objects of false pride. “The temple had become the delight of the people’s eyes and the pride of their power. Instead of the sign of Yahweh’s presence directing the people to him, the sign had become their heart’s desire.”[[35]](#footnote-36) Though the phrase’s association with the ones that follow works against that understanding, people might owe it to themselves and to Yahweh to think about that possibility. There is presumably nothing pejorative about the object of “the delight of your eyes,” Yahweh’s earlier phrase that implicitly referred to Ezekiel’s wife, but the fact that she was about to die introduces some ambiguity to it. And “the pity of your spirit” (מַחְמַל נַפְשְׁכֶם) underscores the ambiguity in this sequence of phrases: there is going to be reason for people to pity the temple (the verb חָמַל occurs more in Ezekiel than anywhere else: see 5:11; 7:4, 9; 8:18; 9:5, 10; 16:5; 36:21).

The reference to “your sons and your daughters “ increases the impression that Yahweh speaks about the city and its people as much as the temple, with the temple perhaps being a synecdoche\* for the city (Block, 1:786). The Babylonians didn’t take off the youngsters but focused on the important people, who were somewhat like hostages to encourage the city’s future faithfulness (Zimmerli, 1:507), and the parents hoped to see them again someday.…

**24:22–23** Everything Yahweh has threatened would surely drive the Kebarites into mourning like someone mourning for his wife. But when the disaster happens, they are to respond the way they have seen Ezekiel respond to his wife’s death. In isolation, Yahweh’s words could amount to prediction (“you will”) rather than prescription (“you are to”), but they were prescriptive in 24:16–17, and they likely are here, too. The description of their expected reaction comes in more or less the reverse of the description to Ezekiel in 24:16–17: not covering the moustache and not eating people’s bread, wearing respectable headgear and shoes, not howling or crying. It’s to be a silent mourning, like Aaron’s in Lev 10:1–7.[[36]](#footnote-37) Whether predictive or prescriptive, the importance lies in the reason for the strange reaction. But they will now be overwhelmed not merely by the horror of the event but by a recognition of its cause, their waywardness. It is this that will make them “waste away” (מָקַק). Ezekiel has three of the nine occurrences of this verb (cf. 4:17; 33:10), all in a similar connection. But Lev 26:39 has two occurrences in the same connection, in a chapter with which Ezekiel often links (Häner, 278–89), where “the pride of your strength” also featured (Lev 26:19). Once again, Yahweh’s threats (and promises) in Lev 26 are key to understanding the people’s destiny. What happens will make them “moan” (נָהַם). Will they be moaning because they are wasting away as a result of their waywardness and consequent loss and suffering? Or are they now grieving over their waywardness itself, the reason for the suffering not merely the fact, as Lamentations will? (Fairbairn, 267–68).

**24:24** The event doesn’t involve Ezekiel performing his usual kind of sign-act or symbolic drama. It’s an act in real life, and he *is* the sign-act. Or rather, he is the “portent” (מוֹפֵת), as in 12:6, 11, one of a number of links with 12:1–16 (Häner, 197–99). On this occasion, he could not function as a prophet without using his body.[[37]](#footnote-38) Then they are to *do* as he has *done*. *B. Sanh.* 22a reverses the point: “Any man whose first wife dies, it is as if the temple were destroyed” (cf. Zimmerli, 1:505).

**24:25** The reference to acknowledging Yahweh (24:24) had made clear that Yahweh’s message had come to an interim close. He had completed what he wanted to say to the Kebarites at the time of the portent. The resumptive introduction now makes explicit that he is now addressing Ezekiel again—though perhaps Ezekiel also told his community about this footnote to the message. Whatever the date of the message about the “blow” and the death of Ezekiel’s wife, these closing verses look forward to another undated moment—the moment that will be related in 33:21–22. But the threefold reference to a “day” pairs with the threefold reference in 24:2, and with it forms a frame around this chapter.

The announcement brings a description of the sanctuary that overlaps with the one in 24:21. It adds the picture of the sanctuary as “the celebration to their splendor” (מְשׁוֹשׁ תּׅפְאַרְתֶּם) which also overlaps with the description of the sacred mountain in Psa 48:1–3 [2–4]. The sanctuary is an object of joy to Israel, even to the Kebarites at a distance (Isa 24:8; 62:5). It is an object of honor, of “splendor.” It makes them proud. The word “splendor (תּׅפְאֶרֶֶת/תּׅפְאָרָה) occurred three times in an earlier Jerusalem allegory (Ezek 16:12, 17, 39) and it sits ironically alongside the injunction about wearing a hat (פְּאֵר), which might be thought to denote splendid headgear. Further, the sanctuary is “the uplifting to their spirits” (מַשָֹּא): the thing they lift their spirits up to or the thing that lifts their spirits? Either way, its loss is grievous. Yahweh “seems almost to savor the losses to be suffered by the exiles, otherwise why particularize them at such length?” (Greenberg, 2:516). Is it is some way an expression of hope that he will not need to take the action, if only people will respond to his threats?

**24:26–27** Against the background of the disaster happening, however, the word “survivor” (פָּלׅיט) is a slight encouragement, as is Yahweh’s declaration about this survivor. Yahweh spoke thus about survivors in 6:8–10; 7:16 and about a body of survivors (פְּלׅיטָה) in 14:21–23. The expression is related to terms such as “remain” (שָׁאַר) and “remnant” (שְׁאֵרׅית) in Isaiah and Jeremiah (Ezekiel does not use these words in an encouraging way). This survivor who has escaped might be a sign that there is a future. The fact that Yahweh makes it possible for Ezekiel’s mouth to open to him is another such sign. Once again Ezekiel *is* the sign-act, the ”portent,” and in a positive way. How has he been “silent” (cf. 3:26)? Has he been silent for a day or so (cf. 33:22)? Has he been silent for two or three years except when given a message by Yahweh? Has he been holding back from giving any message with promise? Has he been holding back from prayer and is he now able to pray? If so, “the divine restriction on intercession” presupposed here “is best understood as a way in which God safeguards his punitive plans from the forces of his own compassion.”[[38]](#footnote-39)

### Biblical Theology Comments

“Here am I, taking from you the delight of your eyes, with a blow” (24:15). Yahweh’s declaration of intent recalls Job’s acknowledgment, “Yahweh gave and Yahweh took. Yahweh’s name be praised” (Job 1:21; Jenson, 203). How can that be right? It’s hard to work out Ezekiel’s theodicy,[[39]](#footnote-40) and the reason is that he doesn’t have one. The theodicy question is a modern one (see “Ezekiel over the Millennia” in the Introduction to this commentary). So trying to relate theodicy and Ezekiel is a bit like trying to relate science and Genesis. But as modern people we are inclined to assume that our way at looking at things is right and that we ought to be able to see how God’s actions fit with our way of looking at things. If we assume that our way of looking at things is not totally wrong, however, what can we say about the things Yahweh says to Ezekiel or Job says to himself or to his friends?

Job’s confession traditionally features in the Funeral Service, even though Job knows that Yahweh’s taking was something that happened in an extraordinary fashion in what happened to him and his family, as was the case for Ezekiel. What happens in Ezek 24 is different from God’s regular giving at every birth and taking away at every death. It’s also different from his giving and taking away in indirectly via processes built into creation (by his action). Maybe God works in that indirect way with Ezekiel’s wife. The passage’s focus lies on the shocking nature of the reaction to her death required of Ezekiel, rather than the shocking nature of her death. Ezekiel will not have been the last Kebarite to lose his or her spouse to some devastating illness.

Yet the Ezekiel scroll doesn’t seek to get Yahweh off the hook with such reflections. It leaves modern readers with the scandal or challenge that God assumes the right to do with us as he wishes in the context of a purpose that is bigger than us, and assumes the right to require a sacrifice of us. “When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.”[[40]](#footnote-41)

### Application and Devotional Implications

There are reasons for grieving and mourning. It honors the person who has died rather than treating them as insignificant. It supports the person who has died rather than abandoning them. It recognizes the importance of the event rather than implying that it means nothing. It gives expression to a sense of loss rather than bottling it up. It calls on God for comfort rather than thinking one should be able to manage. It calls on other people for comfort rather than insisting on managing bravely on one’s own. It reminds other people of the reality of death and loss. It can encourage the taking of responsibility for something that has happened, rather than denying it.

Yet there are also reasons for holding back from grief. “We can wrap ourselves in grief like a cocoon of self-pity, and we can worry our woundedness into a festering sore” (Odell, 321). There may be something bigger that we have to attend to.[[41]](#footnote-42)

### Selected Bibliography

Amzallag, Nissim. “Revisiting the Ezekiel Theodicy.” *RB* 128 (2021): 525–45.

Cook, Stephen L. “The Speechless Suppression of Grief in Ezekiel 24:15–27: The Death of Ezekiel’s Wife and the Prophet’s Abnormal Response.” In John J. Ahn and Stephen L. Cook, ed., *Thus Says the LORD: Essays on the Former and Latter Prophets in Honor of Robert R. Wilson*, 222–33. LHBOTS 502. London: T&T Clark, 2009.

Döhling, Jan-Dirk. “Prophetische Körper: Ein exegetisch-soziologisches Plädoyer zu einer vernachlässigten Dimension der sog. ’prophetischen Zeichenhandlungen.’” *BZ* 57 (2013): 244–71.

Gross, Carl. “Who Am I? And Other Puzzles in **Ezekiel** **24.” *The Bible Translator Technical Papers* 54 (2003): 325–31.**

**Langley, Andrew P. “**Yahweh as the Direction of Reference in Ezekiel’s Oracles Against the Nations.” In Hywel Clifford and Megan Daffern, *The Exegetical and the Ethical: The Bible and the Academy in the Public Square. Essays for the Occasion of Professor John Barton’s 70th Birthday*, 142–61. BibInt 197. Leiden: Brill, 2022.

**Lapsley, Jacqueline E. “**A Feeling for God: Emotions and Moral Formation in Ezekiel 24:15–27.” In M. Daniel Carroll R. and Jacqueline. E. Lapsley*,* ed*., Character Ethics and the Old Testament: Moral Dimensions of Scripture*, 93–102. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007.

Lipton, Diana. “Early Mourning Versus Posthumous Ritual in Ezekiel 24.” *VT* 56 (2006): 185–202.

Lust, Johan. “The Delight of Ezekiel’s Eyes: Ez 24:15–24 in Hebrew and in Greek.” In Bernard A. Taylor, ed., *X Congress of the International Organization for Septuagint and Cognate Studies, Oslo, 1998*, 1–26. Atlanta: SBL, 2001.

McIntire, Mark. “From Bound and Gagged to Swimming in the Water of Life: How God Breaks and Heals Ezekiel.” *RevExp* 111 (2014): 329–36.

Rossi, Benedetta. “Do the Prophets Have a Private Life? Women as Literary and Redactional Tools.” In L. Juliana Claassens and Irmtraud Fischer, ed., *Prophecy and Gender in the Hebrew Bible*, 293–314. BAtlanta: SBL, 2021.

Tiemeyer, Lena-Sofia. “God’s Hidden Compassion.” *TynB* 57 (2006): 191–213.

Tuell, Stephen S. “Should Ezekiel Go To Rehab? The Method to Ezekiel's ‘Madness.’” *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 3 (2009): 289–302.

## The Neighbors: Profanation and Redress (25:1–17)

### Outline

A new message begins with 25:1 and continues through 25:1–17, with subheadings that divide it into statements about Ammon, Moab and Seir, Edom, and Philistia. The focus in the first two declarations lies on scorn, and then on dispossession in the “therefore,” while the focus in the second two is on redress, fury, and destruction both in the critique and in the “therefore.” None of the declarations amounts to a promise of vengeance for the wrong these peoples have done to Judah, or a promise that Judah will regain land that it has lost. The message promises no benefit for Israel (Odell, 324), though it does envisage Israel being the means of acting Yahweh’s redress from Edom. If there is to be a result of the action promised in the “therefore,” it is that the different peoples will acknowledge Yahweh—with the focus not being on this as a blessing for them but on putting things right in their perception of the world and reality. It is the same result that is designed to come from Yahweh’s action in relation to Judah, though Ezekiel may hope that the Kebarites will also see a possible reverse logic, a rhetoric “affirming not only the dispossession of the belligerent nations, but also that of Judah.”[[42]](#footnote-43)

The four declarations cover the nations around Israel in a clockwise sequence, northeast, east, southeast, west. They are “the usual suspects” (Bowen, 153), near relatives and recurrent rivals of Judah. All could be visible from Jerusalem (Wright, 233–34). All live in not-very-willing subservience to Babylon and with recurrent inclination to assert their independence, like Judah. As is the case with the form of the declarations and their themes, however, against that background the pattern and structure of the chapter manifest some diversity. The three peoples to the east have their traditional homes east of the Jordan, and the First Testament portrays them as indigenous to the area and as related to one another and to Israel. The Philistines live to the west, on the Mediterranean, and came originally from somewhere across the Mediterranean. They are closer to Egypt and under greater temptation and pressure to accept a position of subservience to Egypt rather than Babylon. There are also distinctive individual features about all four peoples and their relationship to Judah that lie in the background of the chapter.

Ezek 25 sits next to the messages about Tyre, Sidon, and Egypt with which they form a block of messages about foreign nations that have some analogies with such blocks in Isaiah and Jeremiah. But there are considerable differences in nature, structure, and length between the material on the first four and that on the later three, while there are links between Ezek 24 and 25 and a new date in 26:1. The message opens in 25:3b with a reference to treating Yahweh’s sanctuary as ordinary, the action that 24:21 had in prospect, which links 25:1–17 with 24:15–27, as the references to “that day” and “this day” linked 24:15–27 and 24:1–14. The three separate messages in Ezek 24–25 form a unit. The profanation that was threatened has now happened. The three messages are arranged in chronological sequence, with their references to the beginning of the siege, the prospect of the capture of the city, and its capture as a past event.

In some ways, Ezek 25 has at least as much in common with Amos 1–2 as with Ezek 26–32.[[43]](#footnote-44) Amos’s messages also mostly concern Israel’s neighbors. And whereas prophecies about foreign nations might be designed to promise military victory over the other nations, neither Ezek 25 nor Amos 1–2 has this aim. Neither manifests the cosmic or supra-historical motifs that appear in Ezek 26–32 and in Isaiah and Jeremiah. They are more down to earth. A contrast is that Amos does not focus mainly on nations that have been attacking Israel. And in Amos the messages about foreign nations lead into a message about Israel and indicate that Israel is in as much trouble as its neighbors, while Ezekiel has them issuing from his message about Israel and indicating that the neighbors are in as much trouble as Israel. Ezek 25 is not implying that Judah is the innocent victim of Ammonite, Moabite, Edomite, and Philistine aggression. In Ezekiel “there are no victims, no high moral ground, and no spoils of victory” (Odell, 330). But Ezekiel is implying that “judgment began at the house of God, and therefore with them the prophets began, who were the judges; but it must not end there, and therefore they must not” (Henry, 1291). Greenhill (586) comments:

Being taken off from prophesying against the Jews for the present, he receives commission now to prophesy against the gentiles, who accused the God of the Jews either of weakness, that he could not defend his city and temple, or of malice toward his people, whom, if he could deliver, yet he left to the spoil of enemies. The Lord, therefore, would have them know that he is neither weak, nor malicious, but the great God of heaven and earth, who in justice punished his own people for their sins, and would not spare them, being guilty; and therefore commands Ezekiel now to declare his judgments against them.

In the context of the sanctuary being treated as ordinary, the land being wasted, and Judah being exiled in 587, Jerusalemites lamented:

How the city sat down alone,

one that was great with a people.…

For her, there is no one comforting

from all her friends.

As all her neighbors broke faith with her,

to her they became enemies.

Judah went into exile away from humbling,

away from greatness of servitude.…

The adversaries looked at her–

they laughed over her ceasing.…

Because she saw nations

that came to her sanctuary.…

Look, Yahweh, and take note,

because I became despicable.…

The Lord swallowed up, and did not spare,

all Jacob’s habitats. (Lam 1:1, 2, 3, 7, 10, 11; 2:2)[[44]](#footnote-45)

And in due course Yahweh responded with a commission that began, “Comfort, comfort my people” (Isa 40:1). It is easy to imagine Kebarites lamenting in a similar way to the Jerusalemites:

The Ammonites have rejoiced over the profaning Yahweh’s sanctuary,

over the wasting of the land of Israel and the exiling of Judah.

Moab and Seՙir have said that Judah is no different from any other nation,

Edom and the Philistines have taken redress against Judah.

And one could then picture Ezek 25 as Yahweh’s response to their lament, as one can picture Isa 40 as Yahweh’s response to the Jerusalemites’ lament. As Yahweh will speak via a prophet to give a commission to unnamed comforters of Judah that the Jerusalemites will be able to overhear, he here speaks via a prophet to give a message to named neighbors of Judah that the Kebarites will be able to overhear.

The chapter unfolds:

Introduction (25:1)

Regarding the Ammonites (25:2–7)

Introduction (25:2–3)

Hear the word of the Lord Yahweh (25:3)

The Lord Yahweh has said this (25:3, 6)

On account of your … (25:3, 6)

Therefore … (25:4–5a, 7abα)

And you will acknowledge that I am Yahweh (25:5b, 7β)

Regarding Moab and Seir (25:8–11)

The Lord Yahweh has said this (25:8)

On account of Moab and Seir’s … (25:8)

Therefore … (25:9–11a)

And they will acknowledge that I am Yahweh (25:11bβ)

Regarding Edom (25:12–14)

The Lord Yahweh has said this (25:12)

On account of Edom’s … (25:12)

Therefore … (25:13–14a)

And they will acknowledge my redress (Yahweh’s affirmation) (25:14b)

Regarding the Philistines (25:15–17)

The Lord Yahweh has said this (25:15, 16)

On account of the Philistines’ … (25:15)

Therefore … (25:16–17a)

And they will acknowledge that I am Yahweh … (25:17b)

The content of the “on account of” and the “therefore” is different for each declaration, and while the four declarations have a common shape or pattern, each instantiation of the pattern shows some variation. To note one example: the first declaration rhetorically addresses the Ammonites, and thus the subject in the acknowledgment of Yahweh is “you,” but the other declarations have no “you” and the subject in the acknowledgment is “they.” Further, the acknowledgment’s wording takes the usual form in 24:5, 7, and 11, but it varies in 25:14 and 17. The prophet thus gives a consistent shape to the declarations for his hearers in Kebar, but also keeps them on their toes or maintains interest by the variation.

### Translation

1Yahweh’s message came to me: 2My man, Set your face towards the Ammonites an prophesy against them. 3Say to the Ammonites, Listen to the Lord Yahweh’s message. The Lord Yahweh has said this. On account of [[45]](#footnote-46) your saying,[[46]](#footnote-47) “Ah!” regarding my sanctuary when it was treated as ordinary,[[47]](#footnote-48) and regarding the land of Israel when it became desolate, and regarding Judah’s household when it went into exile,

4Therefore here am I,

giving you to the Easterners as a possession,

So that they may settle their encampments[[48]](#footnote-49) within you

and make their homes within you,

Those people eating your fruit

and those people drinking your milk.

5I will make Rabbah a camels’ habitat,

the Ammonites a place for a flock to rest.[[49]](#footnote-50)

And you will acknowledge that I am Yahweh.

6Because the Lord Yahweh has said this. On account of your striking a hand and your stamping with a foot, and celebrating with all your contempt of spirit towards the land of Israel:

7Therefore here am I,

I am stretching out my hand against you,

I am giving you for looting to the nations,

I am cutting you off from among the peoples,

I am wiping you out from among the countries—

destroying you.[[50]](#footnote-51)

And you will acknowledge that I am Yahweh.

8The Lord Yahweh has said this. On account of Moab and Seՙir saying, “There, Judah’s household is like all the nations,” 9therefore, here am I, opening Moab’s flank at the towns, at its towns at its frontier,[[51]](#footnote-52) a splendor of a country, Bet-yeshimot, Baՙal-meՙon,[[52]](#footnote-53) and Qiryatayim. 10To the Easterners, together with the Ammonites, I will give it[[53]](#footnote-54) as a possession, in order that the Ammonites may not be remembered among the peoples, 11and against Moab I may act on rulings. And they will acknowledge that I am Yahweh.

12The Lord Yahweh has said this. On account of Edom acting by taking redress towards Judah’s household, becoming unequivocally accountable[[54]](#footnote-55) and taking redress against them, 13therefore the Lord Yahweh has said this: So I will stretch out my hand against Edom, cut off from it human being and animal, and make it a waste, as from Teman and to Dedan they will fall to the sword. 14I will impose my redress on Edom by the hand of my people Israel, and they will act against Edom in accordance with my anger and in accordance with my fury. And they will acknowledge my redress (an affirmation of the Lord Yahweh).

15The Lord Yahweh has said this. On account of the Philistines[[55]](#footnote-56) acting in redress, and taking redress with contempt of spirit to bring destruction, in age-long enmity, 16therefore the Lord Yahweh has said this. Here am I, stretching out my hand against the Philistines, cutting off the Keretites, wiping out the rest of the sea coast, 17and bringing great acts of redress on them with furious chastisements. And they will acknowledge that I am Yahweh through my taking my redress on them.

### Textual Notes

MT has markers\* after 25:5, 7, 11, 14, and 17.

**25:3** For “your saying ‘Ah!’” LXX paraphrases with “you exulted.”

**25:4** For וְיׅשְּׁבוּ, “they may settle,” a unique piel form of the verb, LXX implies the more usual qal וְיָשְׁבוּ “they will settle [with].”

**25:6** LXX lacks בְּכָל שָׁאטְךָ. LXX has varying ways of translating (or not translating) forms from שׁוּט II, which are unique to Ezekiel. In 25:15 it has “exulting” (cf. the textual note on 25:3), which in this verse is its translation of שָֹמַח (“celebrate”) (Olley, 410).

**25:7** For Q לְבַז, “as plunder,” K לבג seems to be a slip that could only be understood by taking it to mean “for food” (see BDB, 834).

**25:8** LXX lacks “and Seՙir,” then reads “Israel’s and Judah’s household.”

**25:9** For Q קׅרְיָתָיְמָה, K has the different spelling, קריתמה.

**25:13** For וּדְדָנָה, “and to Dedan,” LXX “those pursued” implies a verb form from נָדַד (Cornill, 338).

**25:17** MT notes that this is the half-way point in Ezekiel.

### Verse-by-Verse Commentary

**25:1–3a** TheAmmonites are the people living northeast of Judah and across the Jordan. Ezekiel is to begin to speak about Ammon just as he could speak about Israel (e.g., 6:2; 11:4; 21:2–3 [7–8]): “Set your face towards… Prophesy to/against.…” He is the means of Yahweh implementing his intent regarding Ammon and regarding Israel, though in both cases only rhetorically. They will not hear the message. Only the Kebarites will, in the first instance, though a broader Israelite audience will hear it later. The Ammonites alone of the peoples in 25:1–17 are the ones he is actually bidden to address, even rhetorically. He speaks *about* the others rather than *to* them.[[56]](#footnote-57) And the parallelism\* and rhythm in the threat to them suggest it comprises poetic lines, such as do not appear in the other declarations. This distinctive treatment of Ammon resonates with its having featured in 21:18–23 [23–28] and having escaped Nebuchadrezzar’s attention on that occasion, with an Ammonite king’s (alleged) involvement in the assassination of Gedaliah not long after the time of this message (Jer 40:14; and see 41:10–15), and with later Ammonite involvement in Jerusalem affairs (Neh 2–4).

**25:3b** Yahweh has three reasons for speaking against Ammon, none of which relate to the considerations just noted or to anything the Ammonites did. All three relate to their reaction to what the Babylonians did. The Ammonites were (allegedly) only too pleased when they heard about the Jerusalem sanctuary being treated as ordinary, about the devastating of the land (the אֲדָמָה, the soil) of Israel, and about the expulsion of Judahites from it (see 2 Kgs 25; 2 Chr 36; Jer 52; and Lamentations). Oecolampadius (164) comments

“Aha!” is the expression of joy and congratulations. As if they had said, “You worship the one God for no purpose and separate yourselves from the rest of people for no reason. Your temple is useless. It is profaned and occupied by Gentiles. The land of the ten tribes is devastated; the people have been carried into captivity.” Therefore, God declares, “Lest you rejoice, Ammonites, the fate that befell Jerusalem will be the same for you from the sons of the East.. . . They will take your camels, drink your milk and eat your fruit; that is to say, they will seize every good thing in your land. (As translated in Beckwith, 139)

**25:4–5** Yahweh’s response to their pleasure is to threaten to give their land to the Easterners, the peoples of the Arabian desert beyond Ammon and Moab. While peoples such as the Ammonites would be even more used to the Easterners engaging in raids on their land than Israel was (see Judg 6:3–6), the Easterners taking it over is different from them raiding and then withdrawing (Eichrodt, 357). “Possession” (מוֹרָשָׁה from יָָרַשׁ) is both a final notion and a theological notion (11:15; 33:24; 36:1–12; Exod 6:8).

For the first time here Yahweh explicitly speaks of other peoples acknowledging him, through his acting against them, in another parallel with Israel. As is often the case with Israel, it is through their experience of reversal that they will come to this recognition. Not only their contempt regarding Yahweh’s sanctuary but also their derision about Israel’s land and Judah’s household imply disdain about Yahweh, and that will be reversed. It will be good news for the Kebarites, but their good news issues from news about Yahweh.

**25:6–7** Inthissupplementary declaration Yahweh first develops the critique of the Ammonites with a more concrete description of their satisfaction at what has happened to Judah. They slapped their sides and stamped their foot like a football crowd. Second, Yahweh develops his threat: he is getting nations in general, not just the eastern desert tribes, to destroy the Ammonites. Once again, the Ammonites are to acknowledge Yahweh, this time after they have been wiped out. While one should not worry too much about the logic of this kind of recurrent statement (e.g. 11:10), here as elsewhere the “you” whom Ezekiel has at least half in mind is his actual audience of Judahites. They are the “you” who will continue to be the people who will acknowledge Yahweh in light of what he does.[[57]](#footnote-58)

**25:8** TheMoabitesalsoliveeast of Judah across the Dead Sea, south of the Ammonites. Their appearance alongside Ammon is thus not surprising, and these two neighbors of Israel often appear together in the First Testament. Their featuring together in 2 Kgs 24:2 is especially significant in the present context. The mention of Seՙir is more surprising, as Seՙir is really another term for Edom, which appears in 25:12–14, but Ezek 35 will speak of Seՙir itself at length and in similar terms to the ones used of Moab here, in connection with the way it offended Yahweh, and even more in connection with Yahweh’s reaction and intentions. So Seՙir’s inclusion here fills out the picture. It also appears alongside Ammon and Moab in an amusing story in 2 Chr 20. Yahweh’s objection to Moab and Seՙir is like Ammon’s: they were only too pleased with what happened to Judah in 587. In light of events to which they themselves contributed, they declare that Judah is just like any other nation. There is nothing is special about Judah.

**25:9** Moab had been flourishing over the years and had many impressive towns. The three that are named are on its west side, which climbs up to several thousand feet. It is Moab’s “flank” or slope (כֶּתֶף), the word for a shoulder that can be applied to a mountainside. The west side would count as its “frontier” (קָצֶה, literally, “end”) from an Israelite viewpoint. The east side on the border of the desert would then be the side that was vulnerable to the Easterners. When Yahweh refers to “a splendor of a country” (צְבׅי אֶרֶץ), he might be designating the area of the three towns as “the most splendid [part] of the country” or the expression might designate Moab as a whole as “the most splendid country” (as they saw it?). It was lusher than Judah—you might go there when there was a famine in Judah (Ruth 1:1). But in Ezek 20:6, 15, the land that Yahweh had given Israel was “the most splendid of all the countries” (צְבׅי הׅיא לְכָל הָאֲרָצוֹת). In Josh 13:16–21 the three towns that Yahweh names are within territory that had once belonged to the Amorites but had then been allocated to Reuben, but Moab had long expanded north into that area. Is Yahweh implying that this area occupied by Moab is really part of Israel? Whatever is the answer, the point is that Moab’s territory reaching down to the Dead Sea is going to cease to be secure.

**25:10–11** The Easterners are thus going to find themselves double agents and beneficiaries of Yahweh’s action. It is they who will find Moab becoming mysteriously vulnerable. It is they who will be the unconscious means of implementing Yahweh’s “rulings” (שְׁפָטׅים), his decisions about what must happen to Moab, as these neighbors and the imperial power by now are in the midst of doing to Judah (16:41). Again Yahweh’s acting in relation to Israel’s neighbors thus compares with his action in relation to Israel itself (e.g., 5:10, 15; Häner, 320–22). The Easterners will thus be able to enter into “possession” of Moab. Yahweh again uses that definitive and theological expression, not only in relation to lands in the highland that border on the desert but in connection with Moab as a whole. It will add to the Easterners’ entering into possession of Ammon, to which Yahweh returns here, further underlining Ammon’s importance in this chapter. To supplement what he said earlier, he declares that the world will forget that Ammon ever existed. Being remembered is an important prospect as we contemplate the idea that our life is coming to an end. It endows us with some ongoing life, some afterlife. It will be denied to Ammon.

I have heard Moab’s reviling,

the insults of Ammon,

Who have reviled my people,

have talked big over their territory.

Therefore, as I live (a declaration of Yahweh Armies, Israel’s God):

Moab will become like Sodom,

the Ammonites like Gomorrah:

The domain of chickweed and a salt-pit,

desolation permanently.…

This is what they will have instead of their majesty,

because they have reviled and talked big

at the people belonging to Yahweh Armies.

Yahweh will be fearsome against them,

because he is reducing all earth’s gods.

All the nations’ shores will bow down to him,

each from its place. (Zeph 2:8–11)

**25:12** Edom is the southernmost of the three peoples across the Jordan, occupying the area southeast of the Dead Sea and south of Judah, but the principle behind Yahweh’s action against Edom differs. He no longer speaks of its pleasure and now speaks of its action. The key word is retribution or “redress” (the nouns נְקָמָה and נָקָם and the verb נָקַם, qal and niphal). The Hebrew words occur five times in the three verses—not so many in the translation because an expression such as “taking redress” is more literally “redressing [with] redress.” Obadiah 11–14 likewise protests the action of the Edomites, who moved gradually north and took over tracts of Judahite land, partly because of pressure from the Nabatean people east of their region. The Edomites were “taking redress” in the sense that relations between Edom and Judah have involved recurrent conflicts between over centuries. The implication here is that Edom was understandably taking the Babylonian invasion as an opportunity to “get their own back” on Judah. Yahweh’s declaration is that they were thereby “becoming accountable” (אָשַׁם), another term applied earlier to Israel (22:4) that Yahweh now applies to other peoples.

**25:13–14** Yet again the threat to Edom is the same as the threat to Israel (see especially 14:12–23),[[58]](#footnote-59) which Yahweh is to some extent now implementing. Teman to Dedan sounds like an equivalent of Dan to Beer Sheba, to denote the land from one end to the other. Dedan was in the far south, really in Arabia rather than Edom, and Teman (see 20:46 [21:2]) may have been in the north of Edom. Yahweh is going to take action against the entirety of the nation. Edom’s taking redress will be succeeded by Edom’s experiencing redress. “Redress” denotes appropriate punishment, proper retribution, not cruel revenge or callous vengeance, but neither does it imply cold decision-making like that of a judge determining a sentence as someone who is not personally affected by the wrong for which he or she is imposing a legal penalty. Yahweh’s redress will be an expression of his “anger,” indeed his “fury.” This redress involves feelings. And Edom will acknowledge it. Unusually, Yahweh declares the intention to use Israel as the means of his taking redress, instead of using a people such as the Easterners. Given that the Edomites were occupying some Judahite land, one might have expected the word “possession” to occur in this declaration (cf. 25:4, 10), but it does not, and Yahweh does not speak in terms of Judah getting its land back (contrast Obadiah). Israel is simply the means of Yahweh’s own redress being exacted. As Yahweh is not like the judge who has no feelings, Israel is to be closer to acting like that. And Edom, too, will acknowledge it: not (only) acknowledge that Yahweh is God, but acknowledge his redress, acknowledge its propriety.

**25:15–17** Finally the Philistines, aka the Keretites, which suggests Cretans and thus fits the general impression that the Philistines came from somewhere across the Mediterranean. They, too, are “taking redress,” and words for redress occur another five times in these three verses. As is the case with the Edomites, this comment reflects the recurrent conflicts between the Israelites and the Philistines. There has been an “age-long enmity” (אֵיבַת עוֹלָם) between the two peoples, notwithstanding periodic ceasefires. These conflicts go back almost as long as the Israelites have been in Canaan, though they had not featured lately as far as we know. And the enmity has been accompanied by a “contempt of spirit” (שְׁאָט בְּנֶפֶשׁ) like that of Ammon (25:6) and an effort to “bring destruction” to Judah. Yahweh threatens to treat the Philistines as he did the Edomites, and thus as he has threatened to treat the Judahites (again, cf. 14:12–23)—and is now treating the Judahites to some extent. He threatens to act against Philistia with “great acts of redress,” as he did with regard to Edom, only more so.

To underline the point further, he will do so with fury as he did to Edom, and with “chastisements” (תּוֹכַחַת). He thus introduces a new expression more or less at the very end of the chapter, another formulation that has applied to Jerusalem (5:15) in a way that worked out its implications more ferociously to Yahweh’s own people. The word occurs only on these two occasions in Ezekiel, and the verb from which it derives (יָכַח) occurs only once (3:26), where it denotes reproof. Noun and verb are characteristic of Proverbs where they denote words or actions that are designed to correct or discipline rather than to penalize or punish in a legal sense. Thus here “chastisements” leads neatly into the aim that the Philistines may acknowledge Yahweh through his taking redress. The aim is to teach them a lesson.

### Biblical Theology Comments

Yahweh did not implement the threats described in Ezek 25. Josephus (*Ant.* 10.9) does report that Nebuchadrezzar, “in the fifth year after the destruction of Jerusalem … made war against the Ammonites, and Moabites,” but he was concerned with asserting Babylonian control over the area rather than destroying it,[[59]](#footnote-60) and the Easterners did not take over Ammon and Moab. In Mal 1:3–4, Yahweh notes that he acted in hostility against Edom, “made its mountains a desolation, its domain a wilderness for jackals,” but he did not cut off human beings from there and Edom continued in being for centuries. The threat to the Philistines is puzzling in a different way, because Nebuchadrezzar had already devastated them in 604/3, destroyed Ashkelon, brought the Philistine city-state system to an end, and transported the kings of Ashdod and Gaza to Babylon in the same way as he did Jehoiachin a little later (*ANET*, 308).[[60]](#footnote-61) On the other hand, this insight about Philistine history may illumine Yahweh’s words about “wiping out the rest of the sea coast,” if there isn’t much of it left by this time. In light of the subsequent history of Ammon, Moab, Edom, and Philistia, how do we understand Yahweh’s message?

* Was Ezekiel mistaken? Since Judah accepted these messages in the context of the Ezekiel scroll, it apparently didn’t think so, and neither did the church that accepted Ezekiel in its Scriptures. Jewish thinkers worried over Ezek 1 but not over Ezek 25.
* Is it impossible for anyone, even Yahweh, to made declarations about the future?
* Did Yahweh change his mind? Jer 18 and Jonah make clear that he can do so, but they also speak of people’s response leading to his having this change of mind, and we have no information on a turning to Yahweh on the part of these peoples—except the conversion of the Idumeans some centuries later: and see Mark 3:8 (Olley, 413).
* Did Yahweh attempt to implement the threats but not succeed because of working through uncooperative human agents? Ezek 23:24 has noted how there can be a divergence between what Yahweh aims to achieve and the action of the people through whom he works, and 26:1–21 with 29:17–19 will suggest an explanation of this kind for his not enabling Nebuchadrezzar to capture Tyre.
* Did Judah fail to implement redress in accordance with Yahweh’s intention?
* Do the reversals that the four peoples do experience count as fulfillment?
* Was Yahweh speaking hyperbolically?\* This would fit the way he has spoken about the destruction of Jerusalem.
* Was he speaking symbolically about a putting down of forces that deserves redress and about the nations recognizing him?

### Application and Devotional Implications

The four Gentile nations’ laughter at the treatment of the temple, their scorn at the idea that Israel was a special people, their age-long hostility, and their contempt of spirit anticipates the anti-Semitism that has commonly characterized the modern Christian and non-Christian world (Jenson, 208–9). Ezek 25 is thus a rebuke to the Christian world, and an encouragement to the Jewish world. “To me belong redress and recompense,” Moses once quoted Yahweh as saying (Deut 32:35), and Paul agreed (Rom 12:19). Romans thus rules out “private vengeance” (Lind, 215), and Deuteronomy and Ezekiel also give no encouragement to public *vengeance* in the sense of Israel getting its own back. Yahweh’s declaration of intent regarding redress takes such action into the realm of his sovereignty rather than leaving Israel to exercise its sovereignty in connection with war, redress, and vengeance. Israel cannot decide. With further paradox, the disparity between what Yahweh says he will do in Ezek 25 and what he actually does adds to the challenge of these assertions in Deuteronomy and in Romans. Israel may well not see Yahweh acting in redress but it still has to leave redress to him. One might have thought that Ezek 25:14 would give Israel permission, even a commission, to be the agents of Yahweh’s redress, but as far as we know Israel acted in hostility towards no one over the next four centuries, until the Maccabean crisis. And after that crisis, amusingly, the Jews leant on the Idumeans to convert to Judaism.

### Selected Bibliography

Geyer, John B. “Mythology and Culture in the Oracles against the Nations.” *VT* 36 (1986): 129–45.

*––– Mythology and Lament: Studies in the Oracles about the Nations*. Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2004.

Koopmans, W. T. “Poetic Reciprocation: The Oracles against Edom and Philistia in Ezek. 25:12-17.” In Johannes C. de Moor and Wilfred G. E. Watson, ed., *Verse in Ancient Near Eastern Prose*, AOAT 42, 113–22. Neukirchen: Neukirchener, 1993.

Langley, Andrew. “The Vindication of YHWH in Ezekiel's Oracles against the Nations.” In Hannes Bezzel, Uwe Becker, and Matthjis de Jong, e., *Prophecy and Foreign Nations: Aspects of the Role of the ‘Nations’ in the Books of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel*, 163–76. FAT 2.135. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2022.

Lee, Lydia. “Hope or Judgment in Ez 25,12–17.” *ZAW* 127 (2015): 636–51.

––– *Mapping Judah’s Fate in Ezekiel’s Oracles against the Nations*. ANEM 15. Atlanta: SBL, 2016.

Mayfield, Tyler D. “Literary Structure in Ezekiel 25: Addressee, Formulas, and Genres.” In Shelley Birdsong and Serge Frolov, ed., *Partners with God: Theological and Critical Readings of the Bible in Honor of Marvin A. Sweeney*, 225–36. Claremont: Claremont Press, 2017.

Petter, Donna Lee. *The Book of Ezekiel and Mesopotamian City Laments*. OBO 246. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011.

Schöpflin, Karin. “Die Tyrosworte im Kontext des Ezechielbuches.” In Markus Witte and Johannes F. Diehl, ed., *Israeliten und Phönizier: Ihre Beziehungen im Spiegel der Archäologie und der Literatur des Alten Testaments und seiner Umwelt*, 191–213.OBO 235. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008.

## I Am a Rock I Am an Island (26:1–21)

### Outline

A little like Jerusalem, the heart of Tyre was a naturally strong rock bastion, with an extensive hinterland beyond the bastion upon which it was dependent for resources. The name Tyre (צֹר) might remind Israelites of a Hebrew word for a rock (צוּר). Tyre’s difference from Jerusalem was that its bastion comprised a small island a few hundred yards off the Phoenician mainland (it ceased to be an island as a result of Alexander’s building a mole out from the mainland when he besieged Tyre, and the mole subsequently silting up). “I am a rock I am an island,” it thus might have said (Bowen, 161). Physically, It resembled Mont Saint-Michel in Normandy, France, or Saint Michael’s Mount in Cornwall, England. It is twenty-to-twenty-five miles north of Akko and west of Dan, even nearer the big Israelite city of Qedesh in Galilee, and thus within easy reach for Jesus (see, e.g., Mark 7). Partly because of its harbor, Tyre was a merchant and maritime city-state, and with Sidon it was the most significant city on the Phoenician coast. In significance it thus resembles Singapore or Dubai.

Assyria had asserted sovereignty over Tyre along with the rest of the Levant and had levied tribute from it, and Babylonia affirmed that arrangement, though Tyre was no more submissive than Judah or other peoples in the region. A Babylonian siege of Tyre would thus fit with the Babylonian siege of Jerusalem. Tyre and Sidon had been party with Edom, Moab, and Ammon in seeking to persuade Judah to join in a rebellion against Babylon early in Zedekiah’s reign (see Jer 27:3). Over the years, relations between Israel and Tyre were generally cooperative (see 1 Kgs 5:1; Psa 45:12; Ezra 3:7) and we have no evidence of conflict or enmity between the two or of Tyrian hostility or aggression towards Judah.

Given that Phoenicia is the next region north from Philistia among the peoples surrounding Israel, and given the opening phrase “on account of the fact that” (26:2), Ezek 26 could have carried straight on from Ezek 25. And Ezek 26 resembles Ezek 25 as a confrontation and threat, while Ezek 27–28 work rather differently. But between Ezek 25 and 26 there comes a new date that marks a new sequence within the Ezekiel scroll, and the date apparently covers the entire substantial material relating to Tyre in Ezek 26–28. The phrase “Yahweh’s message came to me” then covers the entire chapter marked off by the medieval chapter division. Ezek 26 thus links both ways and holds together Ezek 25 and 27–28. Within Ezek 26, however, phrases such as “the Lord Yahweh has said this” recur and suggest that the chapter brings together several originally separate messages.

The first unit (26:2–6) has the expected elements in a confrontational message in Ezekiel:

* an address to Ezekiel (26:2aα), in the standard form
* a critique (26:2aβb), resembling the ones in 25:1–11
* a threat (26:3–6a), longer than the critique, also like the ones in 25:1–17
* a statement of Yahweh’s aim (26:6b) in terms of his being acknowledged

In contrast, the other units have in common that they entirely focus on the nature of the destruction Yahweh intends to bring on Tyre, but they give further no reasons for the calamity. The result is that in the chapter as a whole the sequence of critique leading into threat (“therefore”) that characterizes much of the proclamation in Ezekiel and elsewhere is implicitly reversed. But this first message’ beginning with a critique means that Ezek 26 follows naturally on Ezek 25 in a further respect, as its critique comments on Tyre’s expression of satisfaction at Jerusalem’s fate. That compares with such expressions on the part of Ammon and Moab.

The second unit (26:7–14) contains a double surprise. It has no critique, and instead begins with a spectacular elaboration of the threat towards Tyre in which it announces the coming of Nebuchadrezzar. Whereas the first half of the Ezekiel scroll named no kings, of Judah or Babylon, and Ezek 25 named no agents through whom Yahweh would implement his threats on Judah’s neighbors, suddenly Ezekiel names Nebuchadrezzar. Much of the description recycles expressions from the first unit (Allen, 2:74): he will kill your daughters in the open country with the sword, demolish walls and towers, enter your gateways, scrape your dirt and turn you to bare rock, to a spreading place for nets. But there are new notes: the silencing of music, the demolition of houses, the plundering, the sound of rider, wheel, chariot, and horse. In both respects, the message expands the “therefore.” There is no critique.

A distinctive feature of the third unit (26:15–18) is that it looks beyond Tyre (and Babylon and Jerusalem) to foreign shores. Tyre is thereby given an independent perspective on the threat to it, and so are the Kebarites. The unit takes the form of a death lament, introduced by a portrait of foreign lamenters. The mourning chant itself begins with the “How” (אֵיךְ, or אֵיכָה) that commonly opens a requiem (e.g., Jer 9:19 [18]; Lam 1:1; 2:1; 4:1), and in both the introduction and the requiem, as in other laments, a number of lines are shorter than average and/or have only two stresses in the second colon\* (the translation below notes the rhythm). Death lament will be developed further in Ezek 27 and 28. “The dirges, which contain elements of parody, proleptically eulogize Tyre and its ruler before they have perished. In this way, they communicate the irreversibility of Yhwh’s judgments against Tyre.”[[61]](#footnote-62)

Like the second, the fourth unit (26:19–21) then both takes up motifs from the preceding one and indulges in significant innovation. The city that was renowned becomes the city ruined. The city inhabited becomes like cities not inhabited. The innovation comes especially in the references to the deep and the related theme of going down to Pit, and its themes will be taken further in Ezek 28. Meanwhile, having started with Yahweh’s “I” in 26:3, the chapter’s confrontation of Tyre ends with Yahweh’s “I” in 26:21 (Block, 2: 47).

The sequence of units in the chapter looks likely to have been the sequence of their composition (cf. Zimmerli, 2:33), so that their interrelationship compares with that in Ezek 21 (Darr, on 26:1–21). The first unit came first. The second was composed with the first in mind. The third might have been composed with the first and second in mind and the fourth with the previous three in mind, though the third also anticipates 27:28–36 and the fourth anticipates 32:17–32. All four might have been composed before or during Nebuchadrezzar’s blockade of Tyre, at different stages in the siege. All four might have been composed by Ezekiel or supplemented by his associates. There are no indications of their dating from after Nebuchadrezzar’s lifting the blockade, and no indications of their having been expanded in the Second Temple period, specifically in connection with Alexander’s siege of Tyre,[[62]](#footnote-63) though none of these possibilities can be excluded. Nebuchadrezzar actually laid siege to Tyre in 586, immediately after his destruction of Jerusalem. Josephus (*Ag*. *Ap*. 1.21) reports that the third-century historian Berossus (himself making use of earlier sources) recounts in his *History of Babylonia* how Nebuchadrezzar blockaded Tyre for thirteen years (Josephus also mentions this in Ant 10.11). He then gave up, but did gain its submission to his imperial authority. As is commonly the case with Yahweh’s proclamations through prophets, then, something happened but not everything.[[63]](#footnote-64)

### Translation

1Then, in the eleventh year, on the first of the month, Yahweh’s message came to me: 2My man, on account of the fact that Tyre has said about Jerusalem,

Ah, it has broken,[[64]](#footnote-65)

the doors of the peoples.

As it has turned around to me,

I will be full, it having been laid waste.

3Therefore the Lord Yahweh has said this.

Here am I, against you, Tyre,

and I will get many nations to go up against you.

like the sea getting its waves to go up.[[65]](#footnote-66)

4They will destroy Tyre’s walls

and demolish its towers.

I will scrape its dirt[[66]](#footnote-67) off it

and make it a rocky glare,

5So that it will become a spreading place for nets

in the middle of the sea.

Because I have spoken (an affirmation of the Lord Yahweh).

It will become loot for the nations,

6its daughters that are in the open country

being killed by the sword.

And they will acknowledge that I am Yahweh.

7Because the Lord Yahweh has said this.

Here am I, getting Nebuchadrezzar [[67]](#footnote-68) to come to Tyre,

the king of Babylon, from the north, the king of kings,

With horse, with chariotry, with riders,

an assembly, yes, a huge people.

8Killing with the sword

your daughters in the open country.

He will put a siege tower against you,

throw a mound against you,

set up a shield against you,

9Putting the force of his battering ram against your walls,

and smashing your towers with his swords.[[68]](#footnote-69)

10From the host of his horses

their dust will cover you.

From the sound of rider, wheel, and chariot

your walls will shake,

When he comes into your gateways

like people coming into a breached city.[[69]](#footnote-70)

11With the hooves of his horses

he will trample all your streets,

As he kills your people with the sword,

and your strong pillars fall to the ground.

12They will plunder your resources,

and loot your merchandise.

They will tear down your walls,

and your fine houses they will demolish.

Your stones, your timber, and your dirt,[[70]](#footnote-71)

they will put in the middle of the water.

13I will make the noise of your songs cease,

and the sound of your guitars will not make itself heard anymore.

14I will make you a rocky glare,

so that it will become a spreading place for nets,

[that] will never be rebuilt.[[71]](#footnote-72)

Because I Yahweh have spoken (an affirmation of the Lord Yahweh).

15The Lord Yahweh has said this to Tyre.

At the sound of your fall,

at the groan of one slain, [3-2]

At the killing exacted[[72]](#footnote-73) within you,

the foreign shores[[73]](#footnote-74) will quake, won’t they. [3-2][[74]](#footnote-75)

16They will come down from upon their thrones,

all the princes of the sea. [3-3]

They will remove their coats,

their embroidered clothes they will take off. [2-3]

With tremblings[[75]](#footnote-76) they will clothe themselves,

as they sit on the ground. [2-2]

They will tremble moment after moment[[76]](#footnote-77)

and be desolate at you. [2-2]

17They will raise a requiem over you,

and say of you, [3-2]

How you have perished,

you who were lived in from the seas, [2-2]

The city that was renowned,

which became strong on the sea, [2-4]

It and the people who lived there,

who put terror of them towards all the people who lived there.[[77]](#footnote-78) [2-3]

18Now the foreign shores will tremble,

on the day of your fall. [3-2]

The foreign shores will be fearful,

the people by the sea, at your departure. [2-2]

19Because the Lord Yahweh has said this.

When I make you a city laid waste,

like cities that are not lived in,

When I get the deep to come up over you

and profuse water covers you,

20I will take you down [to be] with people who have gone down to Pit,

to the people of old.

I will cause you to live in the country far below,[[78]](#footnote-79)

like the ruins from of old,

with the people who have gone down to Pit,

In order that you will not abide[[79]](#footnote-80)

or I put splendor in the country of the living,

21As I put you [into] the horrors, and you are no more,

and you will be sought but not found, ever again

(an affirmation of the Lord Yahweh).

### Textual Notes

MT has markers\* after 26:6, 14, 18, and 21.

**26:2** For דַּלְתוֹת הָעַמּׅים, “the doors of the peoples,” LXX “the peoples have perished” may be an inner-Greek corruption (Cornill, 339).

For אׅמָּלְאָה, “I will be full,” LXX, Tg. “the one that was full” imply הַמְּלֵאָה.

**26:16bβ** LXX paraphrases “they will be frightened about their destruction and will groan over you.”

**26:17** For אָבַדְתְּ נוֹשֶׁבֶת, “you have perished, you who were lived in,” LXX has simply “you have been put down,” perhaps deriving נוֹשֶׁבֶת from שָׁבַת “cease” rather than יָשַׁב (Allen, 2:72) and seeing the two verbs as overlapping.

For יוֹשְׁבֶיהָ, NRSV reads הַיַּבָּשָׁה “the mainland.”

**26:20** For תֵֵּשֵׁבׅי, “you will not abide,” NIV “you will return” reads תָּשֻׁבׅי (Ehrlich, 103).

For וְנָתַתּׅי צְבׅי, “or I put splendor,” LXX “nor will you rise” suggests וְתׅתְיַצְּבׅי (Hitzig, 197; cf. NRSV, NIV).

**26:21** LXX lacks “you will be sought but not found.”

### Verse-by-Verse Commentary

**26:1–2a** In the computation in 33:21, Jerusalem had not fallen in the eleventh year. One would then have to take Tyre’s rejoicing as anticipatory (Qimhi, in MG). But in 24:1 Ezekiel used the 2 Kgs 25:1–2 computation with the fall happening in the eleventh full year of Zedekiah’s reign, and on this computation the city would have fallen and the message came after news of the fall reached Kebar and after it reached Tyre—at least in Ezekiel’s mind’s eye (we don’t know why Ezekiel doesn’t give a month for this message). Thus “Tyre… becomes a ‘bystander’ who contributes to Jerusalem’s trauma” (Bowen, 161). Commenting on what someone has “said…” commonly introduces a critique (cf. 25:3).

**26:2b** In Ezekiel’s imagination, then, Tyre pictures Jerusalem surrendering itself, breaking itself open or finding itself broken open to the peoples, to Nebuchadrezzar’s blockading armies. It has been “laid waste,” as Yahweh threatened (6:6; 12:20). Tyre was not part of the besieging forces, as Ammon and Moab were, but Ezekiel imagines Tyre picturing the city’s surrender as an opening up to Tyre. Jerusalem’s doors opening to Nebuchadrezzar’s armies also meant “it has turned round to me.” Given Tyre’s mercantile instincts, the words suggest an awareness of a business opportunity. “I will be full,” it has said to itself. Tyre is the “supplier of merchandise to the peoples” (Tg.). It “gratified many peoples” (27:33). Its ships were full of good things (27:25). Nothing wrong with my doors, Tyre thinks (Jerome, 288).

**26:3–5a** A “therefore” follows, the logic thus paralleling that in 25:3. The Ammonites had said “Ah!” (הָאָח), an expression of satisfaction or happiness, over the Babylonians’ treatment of the temple, the wasting of the country of Israel, and the expelling of Judah, and Yahweh had therefore determined on action. He takes the same attitude to Tyre’s satisfaction at seeing the possibility of gain in Jerusalem’s fall. Once again, he issues similar warnings to another people to ones he has issued to Israel. “Here am I, against you” he said to Jerusalem (5:8). Now he says it to Tyre as it rejoices in Yahweh being against Jerusalem. I will get an assembly to go up against you, he said to Jerusalem (16:40). Now he says it to Tyre. But the formulation is varied so as to be appropriate to Tyre. There is talk of “walls” and “towers,” but first there is talk of “sea” and “waves.” With irony, in Yahweh’s threat “Tyre sinks into the very sea that once formed the basis of its power.”[[80]](#footnote-81) The Tyre messages naturally make many references to Tyre’s relationship to the sea. They may call to mind the sea as a motif in ancient Near Eastern myth that the Kebarites might have been familiar with.[[81]](#footnote-82) To put it in more this-worldly fashion and more concretely, Yahweh will turn the city into “rocky glare,” bare rock (cf. 24:7–8). The transferred epithet pictures bare rock surrounded by water under the glare of the sun, merely a convenient location for drying nets.

**26:5b–6** Like Jerusalem, the bastion of Tyre will become plunder for the nations that attack it. And like Jerusalem, its hinterland will also be devastated and its people slaughtered. Tyre’s “daughters “ are its daughter towns, but Ezekiel’s formulation suggests taking the word both literally and metaphorically as he combines in one threat the thoughts of the devastation of the towns and the slaughter of their people (Darr, on 26:1–6).

**26:7** Only here does the chapter mention Nebuchadrezzar, but what it says is noteworthy. First, he is Yahweh’s agent, though not explicitly Yahweh’s “servant” (so Jer 25:9; 27:6) even in the sense that a servant knows the immediate thing his master wants, even though he doesn’t know how it fits into a big picture (Luke 12:47; John 15:15). Nebuchadrezzar doesn’t know he is acting as Yahweh’s agent. He is making his own decisions about his empire. But Yahweh is operating him. Second, he comes from the north. Tyre is more or less due west of Babylon, though Nebuchadrezzar would reach Tyre from the north as he would Jerusalem, but the north suggests the location of threatening power (1:4; 32:30; 39:2; cf. Jer 1:13–15, and often in Jeremiah; Zech 2:6 [10]). It suggests threatening power under Yahweh’s control. Third, he is “king of kings.” The term was used by Assyrian kingsand will be used by Persian kings (*ANET*, 297, 316). We do not have examples of Babylonian kings using it, but if one had asked Nebuchadrezzar if he was king of kings, it is hard to imagine him refusing the title unless he was being deferential to Marduk. The title indicates that the ruler of the empire is superior to the kings of smaller powers such as Judah or Tyre. The expression is not used of God in the First Testament, though it comes to be so used (see, e.g., 1 Enoch 9). And fourth, Nebuchadrezzar will of course bring an impressive army to blockade Tyre.

**26:8–12** The usual consequences will follow, the experiences with which Ezekiel has threatened Jerusalem. Ezekiel elaborates on 26:3–6. There will be killing on the way to the city which Nebuchadrezzar will then besiege. There will be a siege tower, a mound, a battering ram, the destruction of defense structures, dust, the noise of chariots and riders, and reverberation. The singular “shield” might refer to the shield that each soldier carried, though centuries later the Romans developed the use of a corporate shield made of overlapping individual shields. Ultimately, Nebuchadrezzar will simply walk in, as he or his forces walked into Jerusalem. Tyre will be open to him as Jerusalem was (26:2). There will be trampling, demolition, devastation, and plundering—and “merchandise,” because this is the great trading people.

**26:13–14** The unit closes as it began with motifs that are more distinctive over against 26:3–6. The phrase “the noise of your songs” parallels Amos 5:23, with the difference that there Yahweh simply says he dislikes it, here he announces the intention to silence it. The cessation of celebratory music is a feature in threats of catastrophe, especially in the context of treaty-breaking.[[82]](#footnote-83) Here it also anticipates the contrasting lament of 26:15–18. The last verse takes up one final expression from 26:3–6 and makes it worse.

**26:15–16** In a third message, Yahweh has Ezekiel get the Kebarites to imagine people expressing their shock and dismay over Tyre’s fate (and to join in?). Again the message is formulated in terms that could apply to any city state but that also recognize the particulars of Tyre. It is a place with relationships all over the Mediterranean, so “foreign shores,” the areas now covered by Egypt, Turkey, Greece, and Italy, will hear about its destruction. “The princes of the sea” (that is, the rulers of those countries across the sea) are the people who will express their horror. Coming down from their thrones is a first gesture kings might make in mourning.[[83]](#footnote-84) They will then engage in a modest equivalent of the mourning undertaken by ordinary people as they take off their regal clothes and clothe themselves in trembling instead.

**26:17–18** An expression of horror at someone’s downfall classically begins “How” (אֵיךְ), but the “how” need not imply dismay. It may rather suggest being appalled at something that is both grim and apposite (e.g., Isa 14:4, 12 Jer 50:23). Here one can imagine Ezekiel inviting the Kebarites to hear that nuance in the “How.” Tyre was a nation that was “lived in from the seas.” The elliptical\* expression suggests “you filled yourself with sea-going people.” They were a nation of maritme traders. They were evidently also fighters. Other nations and their traders knew that you don’t mess with Tyrian sailors or Tyrians in general. No wonder the kings clothed themselves in trembling. Could it happen to us? If Tyre could fall, any place could.

**26:19** Whereas the third declaration imagined that the fall of Tyre had happened, the fourth returns to a present in which it has not happened. Its wasting and emptying as a city state is still future. Ezekiel again combines the usual language applying to a city’s fall with description that applies in particular to an oceanside city, and turns the talk of water into an image. In English as in Hebrew, the “deep” (תְּהוֹם) suggests the ocean, but it is not a word that people use to refer to the ocean in an everyday prosaic sense. It suggests the tumultuous depths of the ocean in their fearful, dangerous, life-threatening power. The sea around Tyre can both embody and symbolize that wild, overwhelming power. It’s the most specific hint that 26:19–21 depicts an act of uncreation that contrasts with Gen 1:1–3.[[84]](#footnote-85)

**26:20–21** Ezekiel moves to a different symbolism with overlapping significance. The First Testament assumes that when people die, they do not cease to exist, even though they are then lifeless, and they are not on their own but in the company of other lifeless people. The most common term for their location is Sheol (שְׁאוֹל), to which Ezekiel will refer in 31:15–17; 32:21, 27, but an alternative term is Pit (בּוֹר). In this connection the word is thus used without the article, like שְׁאוֹל. In other connections “pit” is an everyday word, though not a term for a grave (2 Sam 18:17; Jer 41:7–9 prove the rule). The home of the dead, then, is a vast underground dormitory inhabited by people who have “gone down” there over the millennia, “the people of old,” living in “the country below.” Ezekiel is talking about Sheol (Qimhi, in MG) not Gehenna (Rashi, in MG). Going there before its time is the threat to Tyre. It will become “like the ruins from of old,” denuded of its inhabitants who have all gone down to Pit. Like Moab (25:9), only more so, Tyre is currently a place characterized by “splendor in the country of the living,” but Yahweh will see that it does not stay that way (Moshe ben Shesheth, 61–62; cf. Greenberg, 2:539). It will be in “the country far below” instead of “in the country of the living.” It will thus be in “the horrors” (בַּלָּחוֹת), a description of the grim reality of death, specifically when it comes unexpectedly to people to people (e.g., Psa 73:19). Instead of being in a place everybody knows, then, “you will be sought but not found, ever again.” The parallelism\* between “Pit” and “the country far below” suggests they are different terms for Sheol as a whole, rather than the country far below being a subsection of Sheol. Sheol or Pit are a long way away. Once you are taken there, you do not return.

### Biblical Theology Comments

What happens when you die? The Scriptures are not afraid of death and they are mostly accepting of it when it comes at the end of a full life, though Gen 1–3 suggests that life was not supposed to end this way, and the Scriptures agonize over the way death can come before it should (e.g., Pss 30:3 [4]; 143:7). But at the end of a full life it means going to join your family members who have already passed (e.g., Gen 15:15), and ideally you do so in a quite literal sense by joining them in the family tomb. The First Testament is less complicated than the New Testament in this respect. There is no very bad news (there is no Hell) but there is also no very good news (there is no resurrection). The question raised by Gen 1–3 remains unanswered. In the New Testament, things are more complex and the news is both worse and better. Sheol becomes Hades (Acts 2:27, 31), but “Hades” can also refer to Hell (Luke 16:23). If you have turned away from God, then you now have a lot to lose after you die. Conversely, the good news of the gospel is twofold. First, you know that Jesus is with you after you die. And second, you do not stay in your lifeless (but secure) state forever. The fact that Jesus has died and risen from the dead for you means that you will enjoy resurrection life in the new Jerusalem with him. So will Ezekiel, to his surprise.

### Application and Devotional Implications

It’s possible to imagine a slew of possible attitudes in Ezekiel’s heart in delivering a message like the one in this chapter: resentment at Tyre’s failure to join Jerusalem in defending itself from Nebuchadrezzar, hostility in that connection, envy at Tyre’s prosperity and independence. It’s impossible to know Ezekiel’s feelings, and the Scriptures commonly stay quiet about human motivation, which is between him and God. Seeking to second guess it is pointless, except that it may enable us to discover truths about ourselves. Why do we interpret Ezekiel in the way we do? And what does that tell us? What would be our feelings about declaring God’s judgment on a people like Tyre, or on some people contemporary with us that resembles Tyre in significance? And are we Tyre?

Further insight on the significance of Yahweh’s threat emerges from comparing and contrasting it with his threat in Isa 23, the First Testament’s other substantial treatment of Tyre. That chapter emphasizes Tyre’s importance as a center of trade, yet without criticizing it for this reason. If that chapter has a reason for Yahweh’s putting Tyre down, it is simply its importance and prestige, which fits with the hints of rationale in Ezek 26:2. Further, in Isa 23 Yahweh does not see destruction as the end of Tyre’s story. After the archetypal seventy years he will restore it as a trader and dedicate its profits to Yahweh and his people. Theodoret (178, 180–81) comments that this will be a different Tyre, a renewed Tyre.

### Selected Bibliography

Crouch, Carly L. “Ezekiel’s Oracles against the Nations in Light of a Royal Ideology of Warfare.” *JBL* 130 (2011): 473–92.

Goering, Greg Schmidt. “Proleptic Fulfillment of the Prophetic Word: Ezekiel’s Dirges over Tyre and Its Ruler.” *JSOT* 36 (2012): 483–505.

Kellenberger, Edgar. “Der heisse Atem der Konflikte von 593–571 v. Chr.: Ein Methodologisches Plädoyer für einen real existierenden Propheten Ezechiel mit Ecken und Kanten.” *Communio Viatorum* 55/1 (2013): 4–18.

Renz, Thomas. “Proclaiming the Future: History and Theology in Prophecies against Tyre.” *TynB* 51 (2000): 17–58.

Ribeiro, Osvaldo Luiz. “Descriando Tiro: Ez 26,19-21 em comparação a Gn 1,1-3.” Reflexus 9 (2015): 343–65.

Saur, Markus. “Ezekiel 26–28 and the History of Tyre. *SJOT* 24 (2010): 208–21.

*–––* "Tyros im Spiegel des Ezechielbuches." In Markus Witte and Johannes F. Diehl, ed., *Israeliten und Phönizier: Ihre Beziehungen im Spiegel der Archäologie und der Literatur des Alten Testaments und seiner Umwelt*, 165–89.OBO 235. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008.

Sweeney, Marvin. “Myth and History In Ezekiel’s Oracle concerning Tyre (Ezekiel 26–28).” In Dexter E. Callender, ed., *Myth* *and* *Scripture*: *Contemporary* *Perspectives* *on* *Religion*, *Language*, *and* *Imagination*, 129–47. Atlanta: SBL, 2014.

Udd, Kris J. “Prediction and Foreknowledge in Ezekiel's Prophecy against Tyre.” *TynB* 56 (2005): 25–41.

Ulrich, Dean. “Dissonant Prophecy in Ezekiel 26 and 29.” *BBR* 10 (2000): 121–41.

## The Fall of the Titanic (27:1–36)

### Outline

The previous chapter announced that Tyre would be needing a requiem, and this chapter provides one. It describes the manufacture of the good ship Tyre, the world in which it traded and the materials with which it traded, its sinking, and the reaction that would follow. Its parts are thus integrally related in terms of its “plot,” and in some of the words they use.

The introduction (27:1–3a) begins in the same way as Ezek 26, by announcing that a message from Yahweh will follow. The announcement covers Ezek 27 as a whole, in that another such announcement comes in 28:1. Surprisingly, the chapter follows up that announcement by indicating that the “message” will actually comprise a mourning chant. With further surprise, the introduction describes Tyre as currently a great trading people. It evidently has nothing to lament about at the moment. While a mourning song commonly begins with a eulogy recalings the life and significance of the person whose passing it grieves, 27:3a gives the impression that the person is still alive. This is to be another anticipatory requiem, like Ezek 19.

The chapter’s first main unit (27:3b–11) then spends seventeen lines addressing Tyre and acknowledging its present impressiveness, beginning and ending with a comment on how handsome it is (was) and with the truth of its own self-assessment in this connection. “The קינה in Ezekiel 27 is not only free of the scorn, mockery, and judgment that often characterize the prophetic use of laments, but is also strikingly respectful of the island city.”[[85]](#footnote-86) It works by speaking figuratively of the city state as a ship, though it moves between speaking of the ship and of the city state that it represents in the poem. The image of the ship fits Tyre’s position with its relationships all over its world. The chapter gives much space to recalling the raw materials that went into the ship’s building. While it is not surprising that a mourning song begins by recalling the past of the entity that it commemorates, it is surprising for it to focus on the entity’s origin. But the chapter can thus further refer to the different parts of the world with which the ship had connections, from which its raw materials and its crew came, which anticipates the account of different parts of the world to which the ship travelled in the course of its trading and of the different parts of the world to which the city state of Tyre thus related.

Twenty-one more lines describe Tyre’s trading partnerships and the goods in which it traded (27:12–24aα). The unit follows an approximate geographical order, covering Turkey (27:12–15), the Levant (27:16–19), Arabia (27:20–23a), and Mesopotamia (27:23b–24aα), though the reference of many of the place names is tricky.[[86]](#footnote-87) Although the image of Tyre as a trading ship remains in the background, the description thus does not confine itself to places that a ship would visit. It refers to places with which Tyre would also have dealings overland. It is not comprehensive. Notably, it does not refer to Egypt. Nor is its catalog of goods comprehensive—it focuses on luxury goods. The unit might be based on an existent list of trading places and products, and the nature of its reference to Judah and Israel would fit that possibility, but its links with the account of the origin of nations in Gen 10 suggest that Ezekiel’s formulation reflects Israelite consciousness (Eichrodt, 387). Further, it has many links with the units on either side: מַעֲרָב (“trade”) and עׅזָּבוֹן (“wares”), which occur only in this chapter in the First Testament, רֹכֵל (“dealer”), most of whose occurrences in the First Testament are in this chapter, and הוֹן (“resources”) and סֹחֵר (“merchant”). If the unit is based on an existent list, then, it has been adapted to make it form part of the chapter, or the chapter has been adapted to fit it. The terms just noted are all economic ones,[[87]](#footnote-88) and references to Tyre’s economic importance is of key significance in the Tyre chapters in Ezekiel.[[88]](#footnote-89) The economic reference of the recurrent terms also give it a prosaic tone, and its syntax is uneven in its use of these and other terms with ordinary down-to-earth reference. Some translations lay it out as prose, but its rhythm is similar to that of the verses on either side, and poems can treat prosaic subjects such as trade, and can do so in prosaic fashion. A poem by John Masefield begins:

Quinquireme of Nineveh from distant Ophir,  
Rowing home to haven in sunny Palestine,  
With a cargo of ivory,  
And apes and peacocks,  
Sandalwood, cedarwood, and sweet white wine.

That poem goes on to describe a “dirty British coaster” as well as a “stately Spanish galleon.”[[89]](#footnote-90)

Eventually, the occasion for the requiem emerges (27:24aβ–26), though the transition point from description to requiem is indistinct. The calamity is now an event that has actually happened (rhetoricaly). Following on the introduction with its commissioning of a requiem (27:2), both the two long units that followed have constituted a massive raising of suspense, a technique at which Ezekiel is expert (e.g., Ezek 1; 4–5; 10; 16; 20). Now, over three lines Ezekiel pictures the ship loaded up with a cargo, incorporating another reference to Tarshish that makes a link with the beginning of 27:12–24aα. The account of its cargo leads without a pause into three more brief lines that imagine the ship sinking and describe it as if it has happened. “Ezekiel simply takes the ship to sea and sinks it in a single, sudden verse.”[[90]](#footnote-91) The first and last of these three lines have a phrase that underlines another point and makes a link with the beginning of the poem: it all happens “in the heart of the seas” where Tyre thought it was at home (27:4). Three lines (27:24aβ–25a) have the short second colon typical of a lament, and three further lines (27:25b–26) have the tighter 3–2 halting rhythm especially characteristic of such a composition.

Finally, twenty-one more lines revert to a present in which the catastrophe is still future (27:27–36). Again the transition point is indistinct, in that the unit begins with a three-line list of wares and people that could be describing the losses and casualties of the shipwreck. And these lines, too, mostly have the short second cola typical of a requiem-like composition, though the rhythm is less tight than that of 27:25b–26 (the translation below notes the lines’ rhythm). But the wares and people turn out to be not the ones involved in the catastrophe that has already happened in Ezekiel’s imagination. They are the subject of *yiqtol*\* verbs describing the event that is still future. With this unit, then, the chapter completes a complex, jolting narrative sequence. First, Tyre is recently fallen in that it requires a requiem (27:1–2), then it is flourishing in the present (27:3), then the viewpoint becomes distant past (27:4–11), then more general past (27:12–24aα—one could use perfect or imperfect tense in an English translation), then recent past in keeping with the requiem commission (27:25b–26), until this final unit (27:27–36) returns to a present in which the shipwreck is still to come, describes it as a future event, and depicts people’s reaction.

As was the case in Ezek 26, the chapter incorporates no or virtually no critique of Tyre that justifies or explains what happens to it. There is no “therefore” to link the description of Tyre and its fall. Ezekiel may hint that it has no business saying that it is “the ultimate in handsomeness,” though he grants the point (27:3, 11). He may refer to trading in slaves, which a prophet would hardly approve, but he does not actually say that the passengers are slaves (27:13). He may hint that the ship’s captain was unwise in taking on so much cargo, but he also comments on the energy of the rowers (27:25–26a). He doesn’t say that Yahweh caused the shipwreck, only that the east wind did (27:26b). He makes no mention of Babylon, and he might be interpreted as accepting Babylon’s position as Yahweh’s agent in putting down Tyre and Egypt (Skinner, 224) or as taking a covertly anti-Babylonian stance.[[91]](#footnote-92) Like many First Testament narratives, Ezek 27 simply tells its story and leaves its readers to think about its implications.

### Translation

1Yahweh’s message came to me: 2So you, my man, lift up a requiem over Tyre. 3Say to Tyre:

You who live at the seaports,[[92]](#footnote-93)

dealer with the peoples on many foreign shores.

The Lord Yahweh has said this.

Tyre, you yourself[[93]](#footnote-94) have said,

I am the ultimate in handsomeness.[[94]](#footnote-95)

4Your frontiers were in the heart of the seas,

as your builders made you ultimately handsome.[[95]](#footnote-96)

5With pines from Senir

they built all the boards[[96]](#footnote-97) for you.

A cedar from Lebanon they got

to make a mast for you.

6Oaks from Bashan

they made into your oars.

Your planking they made of ivory

with cypresses from the shores of Kittim.

7Linen with a pattern from Egypt, it became your spread,

to be an ensign for you.

Blue and purple from the shores of Elishah,

it became your covering.

8People living in Sidon and Arvad

became rowers for you.

Your experts, Tyre, came to be[[97]](#footnote-98) in you,

they were your pilots.[[98]](#footnote-99)

9Elders from Gebal, its experts,

they came to be in you, fixing damage to you.

All the ships of the sea and their mariners

came to be in you for conducting your trade.

10Paras, Lud, and Put

came to be in your force, your men of battle.

Shield and helmet they hung in you,

giving you your splendor.

11People from Arvad and Helek[[99]](#footnote-100)

on your walls around,

And Gammadites, they came to be in your towers,

hanging their quivers on your walls around,

as they made you ultimately handsome.

12Tarshish your merchant,

through the profuseness of all [its] resources,[[100]](#footnote-101)

For[[101]](#footnote-102) silver, iron, tin, and lead

they have given your wares.[[102]](#footnote-103)

13Javan, Tubal, and Meshek,

they have been your dealers.

For the persons of human beings and things of copper

they have given your trade.

14From Bet-togarmah, [for] horses and horsemen,[[103]](#footnote-104)

and mules, they have given your wares.

15People from Dedan, your dealers,

many foreign shores, merchantry in association with you,[[104]](#footnote-105)

In tusks of irony and ebony

they have brought back your payment.

16Aram your merchant, through the profuseness of your business,

for turquoise, purple, and patterned material,

Linen, corals, and ruby,

they have given for your wares.

17Judah and the country of Israel,

they have been your dealers in the wheat of Minnit.

[For] meal,[[105]](#footnote-106) molasses, oil, and balm

they have given your trade.

18Damascus your merchant for the profuseness of your business,

through the profuseness of all resources,

For the wine of Helbon

and the wool of Sahar 19and Dan,[[106]](#footnote-107)

And wine from Uzal,

they have given for your wares.

Polished iron, cassia and cane,

it has been in your trade.

20Dedan your dealer

for saddlecloths[[107]](#footnote-108) for riding,

21Arabia and all the princes of Qedar,

they have been merchants in association with you.

For lambs, rams, and goats,

with them your merchants,

22The dealers of Sheba and Raՙamah,

they have been your dealers.

For the most eminent of every spice and for every precious stone,

and gold, they have given your wares.

23Haran, Kanneh, and Eden,

dealers of Sheba,

Assyria, Kilmad your dealer,

24they have been your dealers for the finest things.[[108]](#footnote-109)

For garments of blue and patterning,

and for coverlets[[109]](#footnote-110) of colored cloths, (3-2)

Bound in ropes,

with cedars, for your dealing, (2-2)

25Tarshish ships

[were] traveling for you [with] your trade. (2-2)

You were full and very heavy

in the heart of the seas. (3-2)

26Into much water they enabled you to come out,

the rowers, you— (3-2)

When the east wind broke you

in the heart of the seas. (3-2)

27Your resources, your wares, your trade,

your mariners, your pilots, (3-2)

People fixing damage to you,

people conducting your trade, (2-2)

All your men of battle, in you,

with your entire assembly, within you, (3-3)

They will fall in the heart of the seas

on the day of your downfall. (3-2)

28At the sound of your pilots’ cry

the common lands will shake. (3-2)

29All the people who handle an oar

will come down from their ships. (2-3)

The mariners, all the sea pilots,

they will stand on the earth. (4-2)

30They will make their voice heard over you,

and cry out with bitterness. (3-2)

They will lift dirt up onto their head

as they mourn in ash. (3-2)

31They will shave their head for you

and put on sack. (3-2)

They will cry for you with bitterness of spirit,

bitter lament. (3-2)

32They will lift up for you a requiem with their wailing,

and lament for you. (4-2)

“Who was like Tyre, like a fortress,[[110]](#footnote-111)

in the middle of the sea?” (3-2)

33When your wares from the seas went out,

you gratified many peoples. (3-3)

For the profuseness of your resources and trade

you enriched earth’s kings. (3-2)

34At the time when you were broken by the seas,

in the depths of the water, (3-1)[[111]](#footnote-112)

Your trade and your entire assembly,

within you they fell. (2-2)

35All the people who live on the foreign shores,

they have become desolate at you. (3-2)

Their kings, their hair has stood on end,

their faces have grimaced.[[112]](#footnote-113) (3-2)

36The merchants among the peoples,

they have hissed at you, (2-2)

As you are coming to be [in] the horrors,

and you will be no more, for all time. (2-2)

### Textual Notes

In Ezek 27 there is an above-average number of differences between MT, LXX, and other ancient translations, especially in connection with 27:4–24aα. Some relate to place names, as unfamiliar place names can easily raise difficulties for interpreters, ancient and modern. In 27:4–11 they also relate to terms for the different parts of the ship that are being described, and to the names of trees, partly because species of trees vary in different geographical areas. In 27:12–24aα they also relate to terms for aspects of trading. For different views on these questions, see, e.g., Block, 2: 55–82; Greenberg, 2: 548–60.

**27:3** Q הַיֹּשֶׁבֶת and K הישבתי are alternative spellings.

**27:6** For קַרְשֵׁךְ, “your planking,” LXX “your sacred things/sanctuaries” implies a form from קדשׁ. Many words in MT in the chapter would ring bells with aspects of the temple building (cf. Geyer, “Ezekiel 27”).

“With cypresses” presupposes the reading בּׅתְאַשֻּׁרׅים (cf. Tg.). MT בַּת אֲשֻׁרׅים, “daughter of the Ashurites,” hardly makes sense.

Q כּׅתּׅיּׅים and K כתים are alternative spellings.

**27:8** LXX also has “your rulers and” at the beginning of the verse, perhaps a conflate (mis)reading (see Cornill, 347).

For חֲכָמַיׅךְ צוֹר, “your experts, Tyre,” NRSV reads חַכְמֵי צֶמֶר “the experts of Zemer,” a place near Arvad (see Gen 10:18) (Cooke, 309).

**27:9** For גְּבַל, Gebal, LXX has Byblos, the Greek form of the city’s later name.

For the rare wordבֶּדֶק , damage,” LXX “counsel” looks like a guess.

**27:11** Forגַּמָּדׅים**,** Gammadites**,** LXX “guards” looks like a misreading (Cooke, 309).

**27:12** For תַּרְשׁׅישׁ, Tarshish, LXX has “Carthagians.” By the translators’ time, Carthage had not only become independent of Tyre, its founder, but had become a major power in the Western Mediterranean.

**27:15** דְּדָן, Dedan, recurs in 27:20 in a context where reference to this place in Arabia fits better. LXX “Rhodes” implies רֹדָן here, which fits in geography but not in the allusion to irony and ebony. See the verse-by-verse commentary.

**27:16** For אֲרָם, Aram, Aq., Syr. “Edom” implies אֱדֹם, while LXX “human beings” implies אָדָָם.

**27:18** For צָחַר, Sahar, LXX has Miletus in western Turkey, which produced good wool, as Sahar did.[[113]](#footnote-114)

**27:19** LXX lacks וְדָן (“and Dan”). NRSV “Vedan” is a transliteration, but no place of this name is known.

LXX “and wine” implies וְיַיׅן, which looks more plausible than MT וְיָוָן, “and Javan” (cf. 27:13). NIV “and casks of wine” presupposes reading the text as וְדַנֵּי יַיׅן (see Allen, 2:82).

LXX “from Asel” (cf. Aq.) then suggests מֵאוּזָל “from Uzal” (Hitzig, 205) for מְאוּזָל, a pual participle from the rare verb אָזַל “go away, go about” (cf. Sym., KJV).

For עָשׁוֹת, “polished,” see BDB. LXX, Vg. “worked” (cf. NRSV, NIV) implies a form from עָשָֹה.

**27:21** In the context of this colon, בְּכָרׅים will mean “for lambs,” but in the context of 27:21–22 one has sympathy with LXX for rendering בְּכָרׅים “camels.”

**27:26** For הקָדׅים, “east,” LXX has “south,” the direction from which such a wind would come for translators in Egypt.

**27:31–32** LXX lacks 27:31 and 32b.

In 27:32a, בְּנׅיהֶם, “their wailing,” is an abbreviation for בּׅנְהׅיהֶם. LXX “their sons” implies בְּנֵיהֶם.

**27:36** MT, has a marker\* after 27:36.

### Verse-by-Verse Commentary

**27:1–3a** Yahweh’s “so you” (וְאַתׇּה) suggests that his commission to Ezekiel *about* Tyre follows on from his preceding message *to* Tyre (cf. the same expression in 7:2; 22:2; 37:15). But he goes on to a double statement creating suspense. What is the significance of his giving Ezekiel a requiem about Tyre, which he is presumably to transmit to the Kebarites, and of his presenting Tyre as listening to its own requiem when it is in the present a “dealer with the peoples on many foreign shores,” one of the great trading peoples in its world? “You who live at the seaports” (pl.) may refer to its having two harbors, facing south and north, which facilitates its trade as its merchants travel across the Mediterranean. It has a key position in the supply chain between producers of raw materials, manufacturers, merchants, and users—actually, eastwards over the land as well as across the sea. Both points about Tyre (location and role) will be significant in what follows.

**27:3b–4** The past tense verb “you yourself have said” might be an appropriate reflection issuing from the building of Tyre that 27:4–11 will now describe. While Tyre was not otherwise distinguished for natural resources, it was noteworthy for its potential as a seaport. But here, “the description, and by implication its magnificence, are set in the past in a sinister fashion” (Allen, 2:85), and “in the heart of the seas” will turn out to be a catastrophic expression (27:25–26). Further, Ezekiel has previously commented unfavorably on what Ammon, Moab, and Tyre itself have “said”: compare and contrast 25:3, 8; 26:2 (Greenberg 2:548). Here there may be a suggestion that Tyre should not be thinking of itself as “the ultimate in handsomeness,” all the more as Psa 50:2 and Lam 2:15 describe Zion in such terms.[[114]](#footnote-115) It may suggest that the Tyre messages set Tyre against Jerusalem and its god (its king!) against Yahweh.[[115]](#footnote-116)

Yet instead of uttering the “therefore” that follows those earlier comments about what other peoples “said,” Yahweh notes how Tyre’s self-assessment is justified (Block, 2:57, 58). Yes, “your builders: they made you ultimately handsome.” While Ezekiel could be speaking of the city of Tyre, he has already referred to Tyre’s frontiers being in the heart of the seas, which hints at the two levels of reference that will run through this chapter. Tyre’s involvement with the sea means that the city itself is almost like a ship, and this chapter is about the ship of Tyre or Tyre as a ship, which sails all over the eastern Mediterranean world. Tyre has no frontiers. Whether or not the city of Tyre is handsome (like Zion), the ship of Tyre certainly is.

**27:5–7** The ship’s raw materials make the point, though much about the trees’ names, origin, and function is uncertain. One set of possible inferences is as follows. From pines (or junipers) from Senir, another name for Hermon or for a nearby mountain (Deut 3:9; Song 4:8), the shipbuilders constructed two entire sets of boards or decks, a lower one for the rowers and an upper one for the rest of the crew (see the translation footnote). A cedar (or fir tree) from Lebanon would be tall and straight and thus made a mast. Oaks (or terebinths) from Bashan made the oars. Cypress (or boxwood) for the “planking,” the hull itself, came from across the sea in Cyprus, and was enhanced with ivory (cf. Amos 3:15; 6:4). “Tyre was built to last” (Odell, 347). Egypt was well-known for its fine linen, and linen with a pattern became the ship’s “spread” or sail that bore its “ensign” or standard, or took a distinctive form that proclaimed its origin. Blue and purple suggests luxury cloth, for an awning to provide a covering from the beating Mediterranean sun. Elishah appears with Kittim and other Mediterranean peoples in Gen 10:4 and is plausibly taken as another part of Cyprus that can be identified with Alashiya/Alasiya (e.g., ANET 356).

**27:8–9a** Then there is the ship’s crew. Being “rowers” is hard work and not very high-ranking, but in its way Sidon is as important as Tyre, so having Sidonian rowers is impressive. Arvad (modern Ruad), over a hundred miles north, was also on an island and an important city in its area. The even more important city of Gebal (now usually referred to as Byblos, modern Jubeil) is between these two. Its senior experts looked after the ongoing seaworthiness of the ship, mending its leaks. Tyre provided its own experts as “pilots,” steerers (see the translation footnote), as opposed to ordinary rowers.

**27:9b–11** Whereas 27:5–9a has been describing the good ship Tyre, 27:9b shifts for a moment to a direct description of the city of Tyre. Within its harbors there are foreign ships from all over the Mediterranean as well as Tyrian vessels, also conducting trade in which Tyre has a key place and from which it profits. The lines that follow continue to be equivocal over whether they refer to ship or city. A city state needs defenders but a ship will also have to be prepared to defend itself from pirates or hostile city states. Yahweh notes how impressive were Tyre’s defenders, people from Paras or Persia to the east, Lud or Lydia to the northwest in Turkey, and Put or Libya (so LXX) to the southwest in Africa. A representation of the siege of Lachish seems to portray a city’s defenders hanging shields on their walls (*ANEP*, #373), and perhaps Ezekiel pictures a ship hanging shields and helmets on its side to draw potential attackers’ attention to the unwisdom of any aggression. Yahweh goes on to describe Arvad as also contributing to the city’s defense, as does Helek (Cilicia in Turkey). Tg. locates the Gammadites, too, in Turkey, in Cappadocia. They added quivers to the city’s adornment. Like the ship’s builders, those defenders thus “made you ultimately handsome.” The compliment repeats the phrase from 27:4 to conclude the description of Tyre.

**27:12** Whereas 27:4–11 related the one-time past event of the building and establishment of Tyre the ship and city state, the past-tense account that now follows is more ambiguous. It vastly elaborates Yahweh’s opening description of Tyre as a dealer and thus suggests it is an account of the trading in which Tyre has been engaged and still is engaged. But 24:24aβ–26 will require a rethink of that assumption. In the setting of a requiem, 24:12–24aα refers to a past that is gone.

In surveying the world with which Tyre plies its trade, Ezekiel begins with Tarshish, whose identity in the First Testament is problematic. It would be most spectacular if Ezekiel was referring to Tartessus in Spain, but that is 2,500 miles from Tyre. Ezekiel makes no other reference to places more than a few hundred miles away, places beyond Ionia, Tubal, and Meshek in Turkey to which the next verse refers. Tarshish also appears in their company and in that of Elishah and Kittim (as in 27:6–7) in Gen 10:2–5. So Josephus’s assumption that Tarshish in Jonah is Tarsus (*Ant*. 9.208) may also apply here. Both Tartessus and Tarsus are in areas known for “resources” (הוֹן) of precious and useful metals with which they could trade with Tyre for wares that the Tyrians brought to Tarshish and which Tarshish then gave to (that is traded with) other people.

**27:13–15** The same is true of Javan (Ionia), Tubal, and Meshek, all in Turkey and thus near Tarsus. They traded human beings as well as copper for the things that Tyre brought to them with which they could do ongoing trade. Amos 1:9–10 and Joel 3:4–8 [4:4–8] also speak of Tyre as involved in human trafficking, though they do not talk in terms of slavery and may be referring to something more like the transporting of (free) British people as bondservants to the Americas in the seventeenth century, or other transporting of free people between the Mediterranean countries. Bet-togarmah (also in Gen 10:3) is also in Turkey or Armenia, in a region with a reputation for trading in horses (Block, 2:73–74). Dedan may refer to Adana and/or the region of the Danunites in eastern Turkey (*ANET* 653–54), in or not far from an area where one might find elephants and thus ivory. Ebony, a dark shiny ornamental wood, goes with irony in a trade context because both are valued decorative resources.

**27:16–19** One would not find turquoise, purple, patterned material, linen, corals, and ruby in Aram. Such merchandise will find its way to Tyre from further south (from Egypt and Arabia) via Aram or via Edom (see the textual note). The merchandise reaching Tyre from or via Israel is not coming so far. Oil from olives, molasses from fruit such as dates, and balm from balsam trees are home-grown products in Israel and across the Jordan. Minnit is across the Jordan in Ammon, which is wheat-growing country. Judah features in an incidental fashion in this survey. For Ezekiel, “the country of Israel” might be another way of referring to Judah, but why would he include the term here? He might think of it as a term a Tyrian could use to denote Samaria. “Wine of Helbon” and “wool of Sahar” come from places in Syria not far from Damascus (Block, 2:76–77). Dan in Israel is on the way to Damascus from Tyre. While Uzal appears in Gen 10:27, the context there suggests a location in Arabia, but the context here suggests that this Uzal (Azel in LXX) is Izalla, another site in Turkey. It has associations both with iron and with wine (Block, 2:76), which might explain the odd combination of references. “Polished iron” is presumably of higher grade than ordinary iron. Cassia and (fragrant) cane are among the ingredients in sacred oil and regular perfume in Israel (Exod 30:23–24; Song 4:14), and presumably likewise in Tyre.

**27:20–22** By this point, at least, Ezekiel has moved south in his coverage of Tyre’s trade. This Dedan (Gen 10:7) is an oasis in north Arabia on the trade route from the south to Tyre. Qedar covers a wide area in the north Arabian desert. Sheba (Gen 10:7) has more than one possible identity, further south on the southwest Arabian coast facing Africa or on the African coast the other side of the Red Sea facing Arabia. Arabia fits this context. Raՙamah (Gen 10:7) was also presumably in Arabia. Ezekiel’s reference to spice, precious stone, and gold parallels the gifts of the queen of Sheba (1 Kgs 10:10).

**27:23–24aα** The listing closes with two brief lines about trade with the northeast. Haran at the top of the Fertile Crescent is within the modern bounds of Turkey. Assyria denotes the remains of the former Assyrian empire, absorbed into Babylonia. Eden may be the Bet-eden of Amos 1:5 and would also be the remains of an old state that had been absorbed into Assyria, Bit-adini. Kanneh and Kilmad are mysteries. These locations northeast of Tyre were presumably engaged not least in mediating trade with lands further east.

**27:24aβ–26a** The account of Tyre’s trade has comprised long subject phrases followed by verbs or copulas near the end. That pattern suggests that the description of the northeastern traders came to a conclusion in 27:24aα. The reference to garments and coverlets begins a new sentence in which readers might notice that the lines now have short second cola, in the manner of lament chants, which harbingers ill. Meanwhile, the cargo looks especially valuable. It is carefully stowed to keep it safe. The reference to Tarshish makes a link with 27:12, but Tarshish there referred to a place, whereas “Tarshish ships” suggests oceangoing vessels big enough to go to a place like Tarshish—whichever is its location (Psa 48:7 [8]; Isa 2:16; 23:1, 14; 60:9). The impressiveness of the vessels would also mean the trade should be secure. Ezekiel again switches between Tyre as a city that possesses ships and Tyre that is itself a ship. The ship of Tyre is full and heavy, but the rowers get it out into the ocean okay, so it is out “in the heart of the seas,” where Yahweh has already noted are its frontiers (27:4). “The pride of the high seas is fully laden, ready to set sail, to tour the world, imposing her mercantile power and advertising her grandeur,” her merchants princes (Isa 23:8). “She who controls the economy rules the world and accumulates vast quantities of wealth” (Block, 2:81).

**27:26b** But there “in the heart of the seas” the fearsome east wind blows up and wrecks the Tarshish ship (cf. Psa 48:7 [8]). Another psalm relates:

He spoke and raised a storm wind,

and it lifted its waves.

They went up to the heavens, they went down to the depths

as their spirit melted away in their trouble.

They reeled and staggered like a drunk,

and all their expertise swallowed itself up.

But they cried out to Yahweh in their trouble,

and he delivered them from their pressures. (Psa 107:25–28)

There is a triple contrast here. Ezekiel says nothing about Yahweh raising the storm wind, or about the sailors crying out to Yahweh (there is a hint that they hardly had time, if they had the inclination), or about Yahweh delivering them.

**27:27** Ezekiel summarizes the categories of people from 27:4–11, and more briefly the categories of cargo from 27:12–24aα. This further sentence, with a long, long subject covering everyone and everything that gets lost, occupies three full lines before we come to the verb in a fourth line. But the verb, “they will fall” (יׅפְְּלוּ) is then *yiqtol* rather than *qatal\**. Like the wreck in 27:24aβ–26, this wreck has happened in Ezekiel’s imagination, but he describes it as something that will indeed come, “in the heart of the seas.”

**27:28–29** A single colon portrays the panic of the ship’s crew. Perhaps the pilots will cry out loudest because they are the “experts” (27:8) who carry responsibility for seeing that the ship finds its way safely into and in the ocean. They will cry out so loud that the mainland countryside will reverberate. The crews of other ships will also respond—again, Ezekiel moves between the notion of the ship Tyre and the city Tyre having a number of ships. Rowers, pilots, mariners in general will leave their ships for the safety of standing on solid earth. No one will want to go to sea. They will mourn. Describing their expressions of grief brings home the grimness of the event that is to happen.

**27:32–36** Ezekiel goes on to relate the questions and exclamations they will speak. Given that Ezek 27 as a whole is a lament, this is **“**a lament within the lament” (Jenson, 215). More briskly and even more clearly than the wider lament that occupies the chapter, it manifests the two regular features of such an expression of grief. First there is a description of how things were before the disaster, in 27:32b–33, a portrayal of wares going out from Tyre in the way 27:12–24aα has described. Then there is an account of the actual disaster, in 27:34. Once again that account points to the irony that “the seas” were the key to Tyre’s flourishing, but now they have brought it catastrophe. The account is dominated by a further description of reactions to the disaster, here dominated by the foreign shores, merchants, and kings who knew Tyre so well. It closes with the declaration that this will not be a temporary setback. And Ezek 27 is the first chapter since the requiem in Ezek 19 that includes no intention that people should acknowledge Yahweh. Instead, the last line repeats 26:19.

### Biblical Theology Comments

Over the past year or two, the seminary in England where I once taught has closed down, the travel organization through which I sometimes booked a vacation in those days has closed down, and the department store where we bought things when we moved back to the U.K. has closed down. In each case it has been said that wiser decisions could have avoided these sad ends or that lapses of faithfulness contributed to them. Yet they were also the victims of circumstances and developments beyond their control. And it’s been said that “Tyre falls not because her activities are evil, but because they cannot be sustained” (Odell, 344) and that “What we have in this lament… is a third-world reaction when disaster strikes a first-world nation” (Clements, 125). And one grieves over the horrifying fate of the land to which Tyre belongs (Lind, 233). Newsom comments:

After the long, slow description of the construction of the ship and its staffing, Ezekiel simply takes the ship to sea and sinks it in a single, sudden verse (v. 26). Immediately the sense of the fragility of the ship dominates the connotations present to the reader. The metaphoric schema through which the readers have been organizing their ideas of Tyre's wealth and power is itself reordered, so that Tyre is seen to be vulnerable to sudden destruction even at the height of its power. Ezekiel's rather risky rhetorical strategy seems worthwhile, since the more one has become committed to the metaphor initially, the more powerful is the reordering of its connotations.[[116]](#footnote-117)

“Tyre, queen of the sea with her merchant and naval fleets, and the center of an advanced economic, political, and artistic culture, was obviously there to stay” (Allen, 2:87). But the most powerful entity in the world can collapse. There may or may not be an implication of wrongfulness or pride. Such things can happen through chance events. God may or not be involved.

### Application and Devotional Implications

Whereas the people of Tyre will not hear this requiem and have chance to respond to it and forestall its necessity, the form of a requiem does invite the Kebarites to imagine the fall of Tyre having happened. How should they respond? Ezek 27 is not an expression of grief like the requiem of David over Saul and Jonathan or that of the Judahites over Josiah (2 Sam 1:17; 2 Chr 35:25). It does not explicitly critique or express sympathy for Tyre, though it might suggest a reminder that we ought to mourn for the calamities of other nations as well as our own, even if they deserved them (Henry, 1304). It does recall the idea of *memento* *mori*, of keeping your mortality in mind, and it reminds nations of that (Odell, 354). But it’s not clear that Ezekiel is exhorting people to a requiem as a way of getting them to see that disaster is coming to them (e.g., Jer 7:29; Ezek 19:1, 14) or that they ought to resist relying on other peoples or being afraid of them or being envious of them. There’s no indication here of envy countered by the prophecy, or of resentment at economic oppression of Israel by Tyre, or of hostility or pleasure expressed or fed by it. The listing of commodities “is clearly a model for John in Rev 18:9–19.2” (Olley, 422), and John and Ezekiel could “appreciate the glamour and the brilliance … of the beauties and amenities of the civilized world.… There was nothing sinful about the commodities which made up Rome’s luxury trade” until they seduced people into utter materialism.[[117]](#footnote-118) But the requiem contains no sarcasm at Tyre’s expense.[[118]](#footnote-119) “Tyre is depicted as a beautiful ship whose success in trade is the very cause of its own demise,”[[119]](#footnote-120) and “it seems somewhat like a freak of fancy in Ezekiel to dwell at such length … on the commercial greatness of Tyre, and to point out, with such elaborate minuteness, both the circumstances connected with her thriving and wide-spread merchandize, and the notes of lamentation and pity that should be raised over her coming ruin” (Fairbairn, 298). *“Ex* *eventu* we know of course that Tyre’s fate at the hands of Babylon was not nearly as devastating as Jerusalem’s,” so that for Ezekiel’s readers a little later than the 580s, the requiem is painfully ironic, and they have to subvert the irony.[[120]](#footnote-121)

The chapter’s lack of explicit or even implicit indications of what the readers were supposed to do with it parallels many chapters in the Scriptures. It opens up the possibility for congregations of asking themselves what the chapter might have to say to them about envy, resentment, hostility, materialism, trust, sympathy, and facing possible disaster.

### Selected Bibliography

Corral, Martin Alonso. *Ezekiel’s Oracles against Tyre: Historical Reality and Motivations*. Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Bíblico, 2002.

Diakonoff, I. M. “The Naval Power and Trade of Tyre.” *IEJ* 42 (1992): 168–93.

Durlesser, James A. “The Sinking of the Ship of Tyre (Ezek 27): A Study of Rhetoric In Hebrew Allegory.” *Proceedings: Eastern Great Lakes and Midwest Biblical Societies* 1 (1987): 79–93.

Geyer, John B. “Ezekiel 27 and the Cosmic Ship.” In Philip R. Davies and David J. A. Clines, ed*., Among the Prophets: Language, Image and Structure in the Prophetic Writings*, 105–26. JSOTSup 144. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993.

Leonard-Fleckman, Mahri. “Lamenting Tyre (Ezekiel 27): A Unique Perspective on Judah's Proximate Other.” *HeBAI* 12 (2022): 134–51.

Newsom, Carol A. “A Maker of Metaphors—Ezekiel’s Oracles against Tyre.” *Interpretation* 38 (1984):151–64.

Strong, John T. “In Defense of the Great King: Ezekiel’s Oracles against Tyre.” In Else K. Holt, Hyun Chul Paul Kim, and Andrew Mein, ed., *Concerning the Nations: Essays on the Oracles against the Nations in Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel*, 179–94. LHBOTS 612. London: T&T Clark, 2015.

Verman, Mark. “Ezekiel, the Wordsmith, and His Prophecies against Tyre.” *JBQ* 45 (2017): 79–86.

Willis, John T. “National ‘Beauty’ and Yahweh’s ‘Glory’ as a Dialectical Key to Ezekielian Theology.” *HBT* 34 (2012): 1–18.

Wilson, Ian Douglas. “Tyre, a Ship: The Metaphorical World of Ezekiel 27 in Ancient Judah.” *ZAW* 125 (2013): 249–62.

Vayntrub, Jacqueline. “Tyre’s Glory and Demise: Totalizing Description in Ezekiel 27.” *CBQ* 82 (2020): 214–36.

Yang, Inchol. “The Metaphor of Tyre as a Ship in Ezekiel 27: Ezekiel’s Resistance against the Neo-Babylonian Empire.” *The Expository Times* 131 (2019–20): 105–14.

## Paradise Lost and Land Regained (28:1–26)

### Outline

The bulk of Ezek 28 consists in two messages relating to the leader and king of Tyre. Ezekiel and other First Testament writings presuppose a coherence and connection between the responsibility, failure, honor, shame, blessing, and trouble that come to the king of Israel, to the rest of Israel’s leadership, and to the people as a whole (see, e.g., the sequence of Ezek 19 and 20). They rarely imply that (for instance) the king honors Yahweh but the people don’t, or vice versa. Modern peoples make similar assumptions about the shared responsibility and destiny of a president or government and its people in connection with a matter such as making war. Prophets such as Ezekiel also make the same assumption about foreign peoples. Here, then, Ezekiel moves from speaking about Tyre the city state and ship to speaking about Tyre’s leader or king. The messages about him take up motifs from the messages about Tyre as a people, and from previous chapters in the scroll. The points of connection suggest that the messages are a continuation or afterword to the ones about Tyre as a whole. Rather than adding anything, they present the previous message under a new aspect as embodied in the ruler of Tyre (Fairbairn, 303). “The king here is simply the representative of the genius of the community” (Skinner, 252). But whereas Ezek 26 and 27 comprised warning with little critique, these two messages combine critique and threat in the more usual prophetic fashion.

Th first (28:1–10) picks up the motifs of Tyre “sitting/living” and being “in the heart of the seas” (27:3–4), of expertise (27:8–9), of wealth or force (חַיִל, 27:10), of gold and silver (27:12, 22), of dealing (e.g., 27:3), and of handsomeness (27:3, 4, 11). It has the “proper” sequencing for a message in Ezekiel: an introduction, a critique, and a threat introduced by a “therefore”—in fact, a repeated “therefore,” as in 5:5–11; 11:16–17; 13:8; 22:19. A distinctive feature is the ruler’s claiming to be a deity (see Sedlmeier, 2:49–58).[[121]](#footnote-122)

The second (28:11–19) likewise picks up the motifs of Tyre needing a requiem (27:2, 32), expertise, handsomeness, and ultimacy (27:3, 4, 11), precious stones and gold (27:22), covering (27:7), ash (27:30), desolation (27:35), and horror (27:36). It combines the requiem pattern of recalling how things were (28:12–15a) and then describing the catastrophe that followed (28:15b–19), with the prophetic message pattern of critique (28:12–16a, 17a, 18a) then threat (28:16b, 17b, 18b–19). The interweaving of the two patterns may be a factor in the message’s not having the two stress cola characteristic of a requiem, in its more elliptical\* nature, and in the variety between translations. In the place of the motif of the ruler claiming to be a deity, this message pictures him as once living in Eden Garden. The rhetorical technique thus compares with Ezek 27, which portrayed the city state as if it were a ship, as this message portrays the king as if he had been a griffin. Ezekiel is not passing on an alternative version of the Eden story or a middle-eastern myth, any more than he is passing on a treatise on shipbuilding in Ezek 27. He is presenting an interpretation of the significance of the king. To put it another way, 28:11–19 operates in the fashion of a chapter such as Ezek 20, which constituted a radical restatement of Ezekiel’s previous message about Israel’s waywardness that worked by developing a revisionist account of Israel’s history. It did not utilize alternative traditions about the history but imaginatively reworked the story to enable it to contribute to conveying the message that Yahweh needed to convey. Thus 28:11–19 radically reformulates the king’s waywardness by imaginatively reworking the story of creation, in combination with other First Testament motifs and motifs from previous chapters in the Ezekiel scroll. It does not imply an alternative account of the story in Genesis but rather shuffles motifs from the story of events in Eden garden, not to relate the beginnings of the story of humanity or to offer a vision of creation or to describe how things went wrong for the world as a whole, but to enable them to contribute to a portrayal of the king of Tyre.[[122]](#footnote-123)

“Yahweh’s message” about Sidon (28:20–23) comprises another warning without critique. The concern with Sidon links with 28:1–19 through the geographical connection between Tyre and Sidon (cf. 27:8). One might see them as twin cities (cf. Jer 47:4; Joel 3:4 [4:4]; Matt 11:21–22; 15:21). Both have good harbors. The First Testament as a whole refers to each of them about equally often. Sidon is older than Tyre and appears in Gen 10 as Tyre does not, but Tyre is more prominent in Kings and Chronicles, and especially in Ezekiel. Sidonians can means Phoenicians (e.g., Deut 3:9).

Two further brief promises about “Israel’s household” (28:24–26) form the last of the five units in the chapter. An “and” links them with what precedes, but any substantial connection is loose. Both promises connect more generally with “all the people who surround them who treat them with contempt” or “all the people who treat them with contempt, around them” so that “they will acknowledge that I am Yahweh” (28:24, 26; see also 28:22). Along with the Sidon message, they close off Ezek 25–28 with their concentration on Israel’s neighbors. And the four declarations about the acknowledging of Yahweh in 28:20–26 have a noteworthy position at the center of Ezek 25–32 (Häner, 342–48).

### Translation

1Yahweh’s message came to me: 2My man, say to the leader of Tyre, The Lord Yahweh has said this.

Since your mind has become lofty,

and you have said, “I am a god,

Sitting on the seat of a deity

in the heart of the seas,”

And you are a human being and not a god,

but you have made your mind like the mind of a deity:

3There, you are more expert than Daniel,

in that people have not kept you in the dark [over] any secret thing!

4By your expertise and by your insight

you have made wealth for yourself.

You have made gold and silver in your treasuries

5by the profuseness of your expertise in dealing.

You have made your wealth profuse,

and your mind has become lofty through your wealth.

6Therefore the Lord Yahweh has said this. Since you have made your mind like a deity’s mind, 7therefore, here am I,

I am bringing foreigners upon you,

the most terrifying of nations.

They will empty their swords

on the handsomeness of your expertise.

They will make your radiance ordinary, slay [you in] your radiance,[[123]](#footnote-124)

8to the Abyss they will take you down.

You will die the definitive death[[124]](#footnote-125) of one slain,

in the heart of the seas.

9Will you actually say, “I am a deity,”

in front of the one who kills you,

And you are a human being and not a god,

at the hand of the one who slays you/makes you ordinary?

10The definitive death of the foreskinned

you will die at the hand of foreigners.

Because I have spoken (an affirmation of the Lord Yahweh).

11Yahweh’s message came to me: 12My man, lift up a requiem over the king of Tyre and say to him, The Lord Yahweh has said this.

You were one sealing the standard,

full of expertise, the ultimate in handsomeness,

13When you were in Eden, God’s garden,[[125]](#footnote-126)

every precious stone your covering,[[126]](#footnote-127)

Carnelian, chrysolite, and amethyst,

beryl, onyx, and jasper,

Sapphire, turquoise, and emerald,[[127]](#footnote-128)

and gold the workmanship of your handsome features[[128]](#footnote-129) and your engravings.[[129]](#footnote-130)

Prepared In you[[130]](#footnote-131) on the day you were created,

14when I set you as an anointed griffin[[131]](#footnote-132) that covers.[[132]](#footnote-133)

You being on God’s sacred mountain,

walking about within the fiery stones.

15You were a person of integrity[[133]](#footnote-134) in your path

from the day of your being created,

Until wickedness let itself be found in you

16in the profuseness of your dealing.

They filled the midst of you with violence and you committed offense,

and I am treating you as ordinary [and removing you] from God’s mountain.

I am eliminating you[[134]](#footnote-135) as a griffin that covers

from within the fiery stones.

17Your mind became lofty because of your handsomeness—

ruining your expertise on account of your radiance.

Throwing you to the ground in front of kings,

I am making you something to look at.

18Because of the profuseness of your acts of waywardness,

through the wrongfulness of your dealing,

you treated your sanctuaries as ordinary.

So I am making a fire come out from within you—

it’s consuming you.

I am making you into ash on the ground

before the eyes of all who look at you.

19All who know you among the peoples,

they are becoming desolate at you,

As you are coming to be [in] the horrors,

and you will be no more, for all time.

20Yahweh’s message came to me: 21My man, set your face towards Sidon and prophesy against it. 22Say, the Lord Yahweh has said this.

Here am I, against you, Sidon,

and I will get myself honor within you.

And they will acknowledge that I am Yahweh

when I act on rulings in it.

and show myself sacred in it.

23I will send off epidemic in it

and blood in its streets.

The slain will fall within it

through[[135]](#footnote-136) the sword against it all around,

and they will acknowledge that I am Yahweh.

24And prickling brier and piercing thorn will no more come to Israel’s household from all the people who surround them who treat them with contempt. And they will acknowledge that I am Yahweh.

25The Lord Yahweh has said this. When I have gathered the household of Israel from the peoples among whom they have scattered, and showed myself sacred through them to the eyes of the nations, they will settle on their own soil that I gave to my servant Jacob. 26They will settle on it in confidence, build houses, and plant vineyards. They will settle on it in confidence, when I have acted on rulings among all the people all around them who treat them with contempt. And they will acknowledge that I am Yahweh.

### Textual Notes

MT has markers\* after 28:5, 10, 19, 24, and 26.

**28:3–5** Whereas MT has an irony running through these verses, LXX makes the point with negatives and questions, perhaps implying that “the presumptuous statements must not be uttered in their dreadful offensiveness in the course of reading in the context of worship” (Zimmerli, 2:74).

**28:3** As in 14:14, Q spells the name דָּנׅיאֵל and K דנאל.

**28:8** לַשַּׁחַת, “to the Abyss,” LXX translates “to destruction” (which fits the noun’s similarity to the verb שָׁחַת) and attaches it to the preceding clause, as the end of 28:7.

**28:9–10** For עֲרֵלׅים… בְּיַד, “at the hand of… the foreskinned,” LXX “by an abundance of the uncircumcised” implies עֲרֵלׅים בְּרֺב, without “the one who slays… death of” (Cornill, 359).

**28:12** For חוֹתֵם תַּכְנׅית “one sealing the standard,” LXX, Vg. “seal of likeness” implies חוֹתַם תַּבְנׅית (LXX then lacks “full of expertise”). “Likeness” (όμοίωσις, *similitudo*) could suggest the influence of Gen 1:26 (cf. Jerome, 323). Aq., Theod. “seal of readiness” imply חוֹתַם תַּכְנׅית.

**28:13** LXX has a longer list of precious stones corresponding in number and order to Exod 28:17–20; 39:10–13.[[136]](#footnote-137)

For מְלֶאכֶת, “workmanship,” LXX “you filled” implies a form from מָלֵא. LXX then has “your treasuries” as object (cf. 28:4).

**28:14** For אַתְּ (“you,” the f. form), LXX has “with,” implying אֶת (LXX then lacks “anointed that covers”). Num 11:15 and Deut 5:24 similarly have אַתְּ as m. instead of the regular אַתָּה (GK 32d).[[137]](#footnote-138) This f. form is one of the features that encouraged wondering about the presence of the first woman as well as the first man in 28:11–19 (see Genesis Rabbah 18:1, on Gen 2:22).[[138]](#footnote-139)

For הִתְהַלָּכְתָּ, “walking about,” LXX “you were born” might reflect the influence of 28:15 (Cornill, 361).

**28:16** I take וָאַבֶּדְְךָ (I am eliminating you) as an abbreviated first-person form in place of the expected וָאֲאַבֶּדְךָ (GK 23d), rather than a third-person verb whose subject would have to be the griffin (so LXX).

**28:17** LXX has “because of the profuseness of your waywardness” before “to the ground.”

**28:23** LXX lacks “I will send off in it.”

**28:25** LXX lacks “the household of.”

**28:26** At the end, LXX also has “their God, and the God of their ancestors.”

### Verse-by-Verse Commentary

**28:1–2** Ezekiel begins with words identical to those in 27:1–3a, except that his addressee is now “the leader of Tyre” as opposed to Tyre itself. If the date in 26:1 applies here, then the ruler is the king known variously as Eth-baal or Itho-baal and as the Second or the Third, but the message does not suggest a reference to a specific king and might date from after this king’s time. “The reproach addressed to him does not reveal any personal details about his character or his political policy, but is couched in terms so general that any Tyrian king might have served as its target. It is rather that the kingship per se is being prosecuted and sentenced in the person of its representative” (Eichrodt, 390). The significance of this concern is indicated by the prominence of the kingship motif through the Tyre and Egypt messages, “part of a wider enterprise in the book to dismantle royal legitimacy.”[[139]](#footnote-140) “Leader” (נָגׅיד) occurs only here in Ezekiel (otherwise in the Prophets only in Isa 55:4; Jer 20:1). Elsewhere it mostly suggests a ruler of lower rank than a king. In light of the critique that follows, it might remind him that he is not really a king—not even a king like Nebuchadrezzar. It initiates Yahweh’s intention to put this ruler in his place. He has come to have too high an opinion of himself, his status, and his importance. The description of him will suggest that he has this high opinion of his importance not over against Tyre but as the representative of Tyre, as the face of Tyre. After all, as ruler of Tyre he has “sat in the heart of the seas” (cf. 27:3–4). He does not rule the world politically or militarily (Babylon does that in Ezekiel’s day, Persia later), but his city state rules the world economically, which is arguably what counts. As Tyre’s ruler, then, in effect he rules the world. The verb for “sit” (יָשַׁב) can mean simply live or dwell (27:3) but also “sit enthroned” (e.g., Psa 2:4). This ruler has said “I am a god” (אֵל), “sitting on the seat of a deity” (אֱלֹהׅים). In the First Testament, אֵל commonly refers to the one deity who really counts as God, to Yahweh (e.g., 10:5), and among neighboring peoples the equivalent term commonly refers to the top deity. It is thus possible that Ezekiel’s readers would understand him to be describing the leader of Tyre as claiming to be El, who had his dwelling in the seas, like the ruler of Tyre.[[140]](#footnote-141) Conversely, both אֵל and אֱלֹהׅים can mean something less than God or a divinity (e.g., אֵל in 31:11; 32:21), and Theod. has ỉσχυρός (strong one) here. But Ezekiel likely doesn’t want to understate the implications of the ruler’s self-understanding with its suggestion of over-reaching self-importance (Olley, 430). A prophet who says have “said” may mean “thought” or “implied.” Let’s be clear, then, Mr. Ruler. You’re not divine. You’re human.

**28:3–5** In this series of sarcastic statements,[[141]](#footnote-142) “Daniel” is presumably the hero in the Aqhat story, discovered 150 miles north of Tyre (see the commentary on 14:14), though that story makes no mention of his expertise.[[142]](#footnote-143) Ezek 27 did speak of Tyre’s “experts” (חָכָם) though not of its “insight” (תְּבוּנָה), but arguably Ezek 28 is simply bringing out a point that would be implicit in an account of successful economic activity. Perhaps one should speak in terms of semi-sarcastic statements, insofar as the leader probably did have expertise and insight, and that by God’s gift. It is implicitly God who has not withheld secrets from him, as he will not later from Daniel (Dan 8:26; 12:4, 9). God is the implicit real subject of the verb that literally grants, “they have not kept you in the dark.” God doesn’t keep any secrets (*CTAT*, 235). Tyre’s leader thus has the expertise and insight that bring wealth when applied to economics. The trouble is that wealth, too, can lead to self-divinization.[[143]](#footnote-144)

**28:6–8** The critique leads into a threat introduced by the common “therefore.” The outrageous self-estimate of Tyre’s leader will lead Yahweh to take action against him. Tyre’s ruling the world economically but not militarily will render it vulnerable to being put down by superior military forces that will “empty their swords” on it, perhaps in order to take control of its economic power, and thus expose the weakness of its handsome economic expertise. In the 580s, the “nations” will be the Babylonians (cf. 26:5–7), the “terrifying” people of 30:11 (and Isa 49:25), Yahweh’s regular agent or servant in the sixth century. But “terrifying” (עָרִיץ; LXX renders “pests”) is a conventional description that can also apply to the Assyrians (Isa 29:5). Any great power needs to be terrifying. Like the non-naming of Tyre’s leader, one must take into account the non-naming of Babylon as well as the appropriateness of the description to the sixth-century power

“Radiance” (יׅפְעָה) occurs only here and in 28:17. The related verb (יָפַע), also rare, usually refers to God “radiating forth” (e.g., Pss 50:2; 94:2), which suggests that Yahweh continues to be snide here about pretensions to deity. “You fancy yourself as having supernatural radiance, do you? Well, we’ll see about that.” The threat works with the existence of the two homonymous roots חָלַל, one meaning “treat as ordinary” (so Vg., Theod.; see 7:21–22), the other meaning “slay” (so LXX; cf. 6:4, 7, 13); see 21:25 [30]. The first meaning works well with the notion of quasi-divine radiance. The second works well with the reference to swords and to descent into the Abyss (שַׁחַת), another term for Pit (26:20), and with the allusions to violent death that follow. While these include another reference to being “slain” by a sword, they also describe this fatal wound as happening “in the heart of the seas.” Here, too, the sea is a position of strength and achievement (cf. 28:2), but also the location of disaster (cf. 27:4, 25, 26, 27).

**28:9–10** While it was possible to take the jibe in 28:3 as a question, 28:9a is explicitly a question, a rhetorical one that is also scornful. Once again Ezekiel works with the homonymous verbs חָלַל I and II “slays” and “makes ordinary.” Yahweh will make clear that the leader is a human being not a deity. The ruler will die—than which nothing more clearly distinguishes humanity from God. Ezekiel adds insult to injury, in that being uncircumcised is a mark of being primitive. Many Middle Eastern people did practice circumcision, so calling people “uncircumcised” parallels calling them “bastards” in English, which need not mean they are illegitimate, but used to be an insult that carried force because being born out of wedlock was shameful. The Tyrian leader will die at the hand of people who may be physically circumcised but are as primitive as Goliath and other Philistines who were not (e.g. 1 Sam 14:6; 17:26), or will die the death of primitive people like that even though he is circumcised.

**28:11–12** The second message begins with words even closer to 27:1–2. The word “requiem” is disturbing or encouraging according to which side you are on. The addressee is now “the king of Tyre,” which is how the ruler of a city state would be known (even though to someone in the West he might seem more like a mere mayor or burgomaster). The description of him as “full of expertise, the ultimate in handsomeness” likewise follows the preceding description of Tyre. He had been the one “sealing the standard” of expertise and good looks. It would be people’s expectation of the king that he would do so.

**28:13** At least, this is how it was in current Levantine history. There was nothing very remarkable about the idea. But Ezekiel now somersaults into a different framework in assuming that one can understand the king by thinking of him not merely in terms of what he is in the present but in terms of creation back at the beginning, as if he were the crown of creation then. If the king implicitly thought of himself as a deity, it is even more plausible to think of him imagining himself as the ultimate embodiment of created humanity. Ezekiel may be taking up an existent assumption that he would, or may be introducing the idea and building on it. Let’s imagine the king as the embodiment of humanity as created, and therefore locate him in Eden Garden. Let’s imagine him as the human being made in God’s image, “sealing the standard.”

The king of a city state in the Levant could also be the senior priest of his city. It was the position of Melchizedeq in Salem and thus a position that the Davidic king inherited (Gen 14:18; Psa 110). Ezekiel portrays the king of Tyre as such a priest in Eden. The combination of kingship and priesthood lies behind the mixed images in this chapter.[[144]](#footnote-145) He is adorned there with precious stones, like a priest, with gold for their settings. The precious stones are his “covering” (מְסֻכָה), another hapax,\* but related words suggest two possible connotations, and the semi-allegorical nature of this message makes it reasonable to take both into account. A related noun (מָסָךְ) can denote a screen, and could suggest a hedge around the garden. The walls and gates of the new Jerusalem (Isa 54:11–12; Rev 21:15–21) were to be studded with precious stones. A related verb (סָכַךְ) in the next verse can refer to the way clothes cover a person, and in the immediate context here the stones more likely refer to the adornment of the clothing that the king wears. It all enhances him in a way that in theory draws attention to his priesthood but in practice must also enhance him, as is inevitably and temptingly the case with any royal or priestly garments. The list of precious stones in 28:13 three-quarters resembles the list of precious stones on Aaron’s vestments in Exod 28:17–20; 39:10–12. LXX has a longer list conforming to that Exodus list. As usual, we don’t know whether in this case LXX has augmented the list to make or complete the comparison, or MT has accidentally lost part of the list. The end result in LXX is further to enhance the king’s appearance. In MT it may be to compromise its impressiveness.

**28:14** Ezekiel goes on to portray the king as anointed, which fits both him being a king and his being a priestly figure. More surprisingly, he is an anointed “griffin” (כְּרוּב, traditionally transliterated “cherub”). The First Testament hardly ever elsewhere refers to a single griffin. A number protected Eden Garden (Gen 3:23), two “cover” (סָכַךְ) the covenant chest with their wings (e.g., Exod 25:20), and a number support the platform on which Yahweh’s throne sits (Ezek 10). Given that the Eden griffins protect the garden from encroachment by human beings, it is surprising that this human person can also be described as a griffin, though less surprising if he is ”a person of integrity” unlike the human beings who had been thrown out of the garden. The king ruling over Tyre was like Adam when commissioned to rule over the garden (Bowen, 172). “The king of Tyre is ironically equated” with “an elevated primordial figure.”[[145]](#footnote-146) Like other aspects of Ezek 28, the chapter may reflect an awareness of ancient Near Eastern myths, but “no myth yet reconstructed adequately deals with why the MT compares the king of Tyre to the cherub. Indeed, many of the arguments are somewhat circular, reconstructing an ancient Near Eastern myth from the biblical material and then interpreting the biblical material according to this reconstructed myth.”[[146]](#footnote-147) More likely, the difference between Ezekiel’s picture and the Genesis story reflects the hermeneutic operating when Ezek 20 retold the story of Israel, where the story people knew was reworked into a revisionist account to address the issues Ezekiel needed to address. This passage is “a prophetic oracle built on allusions to the primal human,”[[147]](#footnote-148) with references to the griffins in Genesis, Exodus, and previous visions in Ezekiel reworked so that they contribute to the message about the king of Tyre. The griffins were creatures straddling the boundary between earthly and supernatural, with some responsibility for safeguarding that boundary. Seeing the king of Tyre as a griffin draws attention to his failure in this connection.[[148]](#footnote-149) He has become an “anarchic cherub.”[[149]](#footnote-150) Taylor (193) comments:

The imagery is dependent on more than just the Genesis story, from which it diverges significantly.… Ezekiel’s imagination wandered freely and drew on a wide variety of symbolical background all interwoven with his message of the fall of Tyre. Thus, the precious stones allude to Tyre’s prosperity and the temptation to sin comes to the city not from without but from greed and pride within (15–17). In addition to the punishment of being cast out of Eden and thrown down upon the earth as a public spectacle (17), it is said that fire (the flaming sword?) comes out from within her and burns her to ashes (18). The seeds of a nation’s destruction are usually to be found within herself.

The king’s being “on God’s sacred mountain,” as well as “in Eden, God’s garden,” further illustrates the hermeneutical process just noted. As images, God’s garden, the mountain where God lived in Jerusalem (e.g., Psa 48:1–2 [2–3]), and the mountain where God appeared at Sinai, come together.[[150]](#footnote-151) They generate a complex portrayal making a link between the way things were at the beginning, the events at Sinai, and the way they are on Mount Zion. Metaphorically speaking, the king walked around in his vestment studded with its fiery-looking stones or walked around within the fiery, studded fence around the garden. The fiery stones in 28:14 and 28:16 can thus be the same stones as the ones in 28:13 (Greenhill, 619; Taylor, 193) (otherwise they are a mystery).

**28:15–16aα** In broad terms, the drama Ezekiel now relates corresponds to the pattern of events in the garden, at Sinai, and in Jerusalem. The king started off as “a person of integrity,” someone תָּמִים, embodying wholeness of character. The statement about him is “one of the highest tributes paid to an individual in the Hebrew Bible.”[[151]](#footnote-152) Adam was not described thus, though Noah was, and Abraham was challenged to be (Gen 6:9; 17:1). But the king fell into being a person of “wickedness” (עַוְלָה; cf. עָוֶל in 28:18, also 3:20; 18:8, 24, 26). This word is also not applied to Adam, which is fair. It denotes something more like the oppression and violence reported of Adam’s immediate descendants, though neither is the word applied to them: see rather Psa 43:1; Mic 3:9–11; Hab 2:12. The talk of wickedness there resonates with Ezekiel’s elucidation here that the king’s wickedness related to “the profuseness of your dealing.” Ezek 27:12, 16, 18 33 has remarked on such profuseness or muchness (רׄב) without negative comment, while 28:5 has commented on it as contributing to the leader’s mind becoming lofty. Here the king’s wickedness finds expression in the extensiveness of his economic activity. The cause of the king’s fall is that he used wholeness and handsomeness to generate economic power.[[152]](#footnote-153)

**28:16aβb** A series of implications or consequences follow. First, the king’s wickedness and the profuseness associated with his economic activity indeed meant that “they filled the midst of you with violence.” Maybe there is profuseness of economic activity without violence, but the two naturally go together. That is especially so if we work with the First Testament’s use of the same word (חָמָס) for violence and for violation or lawlessness (see 7:10–11). Who, then, are “they” who filled the king? Many EVV take it as impersonal and as meaning the king was filled, but “they” could be the wickedness and profuseness, which filled the city state. The king is the leader and embodiment of a people, not an individual on his own.

Second, “you committed offense” (חָטָא, conventionally translated “sin”. The king has offended against God’s standards (cf. 3:20–21; 14:12–13), even insofar as other people were involved in the filling. A tough side to being a leader is your responsibility for the action of the people you lead. Wickedness and profuseness filled, but you committed offense. And if we allow for the link between violence and violation, then “committed offense” reformulates or makes explicit the point about “violence.”

Third, as a consequence Yahweh is “treating you as ordinary,” profaning you, blighting that radiance. He is going to take personal responsibility for what he threatened foreign nations would do (28:7). He uses a *qatal*\* verb here, which implies that in effect he has done it already, because he is set on doing it.

Fourth and further, Yahweh will throw you off his mountain. His words involve an ellipse, a leap in the syntax that corresponds to the leap in the experience they refer to. God threw Adam out of his garden, and he will throw the king off his mountain. Both images suggest a place of privilege, beauty, provision, and the presence of God. Ironically, God will “eliminate” the griffin from the garden he is supposed to protect, banish him (Greenberg, 2:586) “from within the fiery stones.” Whereas earlier this phrase plausibly suggested the priest’s vestment, here it might plausibly suggest the stone-studded fence around the garden.

**28:17** Yahweh goes on to summarize the problem and the action that is following. The king’s mind became lofty because of his handsomeness. His impressiveness and his city’s impressiveness made him think he could do anything. He had the supernatural radiance that would attach to a figure like a griffin. But the result was, “you ruined your expertise.” Ezekiel is not ill-disposed to expertise, to wisdom. People made fun of him as a purveyor of parables, someone with a sharp and creative mind, but he agrees with Proverbs that “true wisdom and pride cannot coexist.”[[153]](#footnote-154) And arrogance fatally undermines expertise, insight, skill, or wisdom. Once more, Ezekiel sees calamity happening through inbuilt dynamics for whose implementation the king is responsible. But he also sees it as happening through the action of the God who throws the king to the ground. It happens in front of kings in the sense that they defeat and depose him. Although Nebuchadrezzar did not destroy Tyre, eventually Tyre had to yield to him in some way, and the king ended up deposed and living in Babylon like Jehoiachin and Zedekiah. A document of Nebuchadrezzar’s lists “the king of Tyre, the king of Gaza, the king of Sidon, the king of Arvad, the king of Ashdod…” (*ANET*, 308; see further Allen, 2:109).It all happens in front of kings also in the sense that it is humiliating. The king will become something to look at, and not in an admiring way.

**28:18** Profuseness is the problem: profuseness of dealing (28:16) and the associated “profuseness of your acts of waywardness” that constitute “the wickedness of your dealing.” Yahweh again restates that wrongdoing and its consequences. The king was the priest cherub in Yahweh’s garden, on Yahweh’s mountain, with the sanctuaries where he ministered (maybe the plural suggests “the great sanctuary”). But “you treated your sanctuaries as ordinary.” Here, at least, both the senses of חָלַל, “treat as ordinary” or “profane,” apply (see 7:21–22). By means of the wickedness he undertook, encouraged, or permitted, he defiled the sanctuary where he ministered, and he made it ordinary. It no longer count as a sanctuary. Ezekiel presupposes a broad-minded understanding of Yahweh’s attitude to sanctuaries in a place like Tyre, or perhaps speaks ironically. Once again Yahweh goes on to combine the reality of calamity happening by natural processes and by his action, though here he puts them in the opposite order from 28:17. “I am making a fire come… I am making you into ash on the ground.” There is something worse than banishment here. But Yahweh is working by making “a fire come out from within you” which is thus “consuming you,” as was happening in Jerusalem (19:14).

**28:19** The close of the long tirade about Tyre reaffirms that the horror of other peoples and their leaders and the threats uttered earlier (26:16, 21; 27:35–36) will apply in particular to the king. Yes, in success, waywardness, and disaster, king and people are one.

**28:20–23** Another new message begins, now relating to Tyre’s neighbor up the coast. After a familiar introduction (cf. 25:1–2), Yahweh’s opening declaration suggests that he is about to act in a way that implies a replay of the action in Egypt that made the exodus possible. It’s not a new exodus (no one needs to escape), but a new assertion of deity.

* I will get honor within you (וְנִכְבַּדְתִּי): cf. Exod 14:4, 17, 18 (in/through you)
* They will acknowledge that I am Yahweh (וְיָדְעוּ): cf. Exod 14:4, 18
* When I act on rulings against it (בַּעֲשֹוֹתִי בָהּ שְׁפָטִים): cf. Exod 12:12; Num 33:4 (against their gods)
* I will show myself sacred (וְנִקְדַּשְׁתִּי); cf. Exod 15:11, “Who is like you, majestic in sacredness?”

By implication, Yahweh’s reason for taking action against Sidon is the reason for taking action against Egypt. He is undertaking an act of self-assertion to demonstrate that he is God. Sidon is only a representative object of the action, alongside Ammon, Moab and Seir, Edom, Philistia, and Tyre, completing the treatment of Israel’s neighbors. Sidon follows on Edom, Moab, Ammon, and Tyre in 27:3, and so it does here. The action will mean epidemic and bloodshed, which are standard threats to Jerusalem (e.g., 5:17). So is sword (e.g., 14:21). Other passages have spoken of the slain falling (e.g., 6:4, 7). So it is almost explicit here that this action means Yahweh is not going to confine his calamities to Judah.

**28:24** But in Egypt, alongside Yahweh’s desire to assert himself over Pharaoh and his gods, there was Yahweh’s desire to deliver the Israelites from their oppressive overlord. Here he promises that the people over whom he is asserting himself will also no longer be harassing Israel, nor will they any longer “treat them with contempt” (שָׁאַט; cf. 25:6, 15). The promise forms another aspect of the closure to the account of Israel’s neighbors.

**28:25–26** So Yahweh promises an end to harassment for Israel. But much of Israel’s household is scattered. There are the northern clans, scattered more than a century previously. There are people like the Kebarites, scattered in different parts of Babylonia in 597. There are the Judahites who will be or were scattered in 587. How many of these people does Ezekiel have in mind when he speaks of gathering Israel’s scattered household? These two verses anticipate promises that will be developed later in the Ezekiel scroll, which might itself makes a quite broad understanding appropriate. So might the expression “their own soil that I gave to my servant Jacob” (cf. Isa 41:8–10). Yahweh thereby reminds himself and reminds his people of his commitment to the entire family descended from Jacob, a commitment that related to the entire land of Canaan. They will be able to dwell here “with confidence” (לׇבֶטַח). The verb from which the noun derives (בׇּטַח) means “trust,” so this noun expression suggests living with a sense of security on the basis of the fact that the object of your trust is reliable.

Building houses and living in them, and planting vineyards and enjoying their fruit, are signs of security since they require time and no vexing neighbors. Another prophet describes these activities as part of the “new heavens and a new earth” that God will create (Isa 65:17, 21; see also Eccl 2:4; Jer 32:15). Repetition emphasizes that Israel really “shall live in safety” when YHWH has executed judgments, not solely on Sidon, but “upon all their neighbors.” By this final manifestation of divine holiness, the exiles will know YHWH. (Bowen, 177)

The gathering will be another way (Yahweh says) in which I will have “showed myself sacred” (קָדַשׁ niphal; cf. 28:22), shown myself God, and shown myself a different kind of God from some others. He will have done so “in the eyes of the nations,” a positive demonstration that contrasts with gloomier ones (5:8; 22:15–16).

Yet another prophet told people such as the Kebarites to build houses and plant gardens where they were (Jer 29:5–6), which might have led to an interesting conversation between the two prophets.[[154]](#footnote-155)

### Biblical Theology Comments

Ezek 28 compares with Isa 14 in describing a king portrayed as a supernatural being and demoted from his position of power. The two passages are not about ordinary humanity going wrong but of government gone wrong, and they illustrate Acton’s observation, “power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely” (Odell 368, 369).[[155]](#footnote-156) Interpreters such as Origen took them to be describing the original demotion of a supernatural “ruler of this world” (Homily 13, 358–61), the fall of Satan.[[156]](#footnote-157) Outside the Scriptures, there are stories about the rebellion and downfall of a supernatural being, and passages such as Ezek 29 and Isa 14 may have such stories in their background. But they are using these stories as a means of conveying what happens to a human ruler who rebels or uses his power for his own ends. Actually, the Scriptures do not give their readers information about “the fall of Satan,” about how there came to be supernatural powers that rebelled against God. It’s one of those questions about which they do not give answers, as Ecclesiastes laments. Gen 6:1–4 is the nearest it comes to an answer—hence the interest in this story in later works such as Enoch. Psa 82 does assert that God will take action against such supernatural powers (Jerome, 321). “The gods must die.”[[157]](#footnote-158)

### Application and Devotional Implications

“Your mind has become lofty, and you have said, I am a god” (28:2). Ironically, the people of Tyre and Sidon subsequently hear in the voice of Herod the voice of God, not of a human being. He fails to give glory to God, and an angel of the Lord strikes him down (Acts 12:21–23).[[158]](#footnote-159) “All forms of sin are abominable, but the most abominable of all is arrogance: ‘Everything elevated is an abomination before the Lord,’ Scripture says, remember, and ‘The Lord resists the arrogant’” (Prov 3:5; Jas 4:6; Theodoret, 188). So the first of the two messages about the ruler of Tyre. The second thoughtfully adds: “When men have natural or acquired excellences beyond others, and abuse them, it is a matter of mourning” (Greenhill, 618).

A number of EVV use the word “proud” in their translation of 28:2, which is not inappropriate, but it draws attention to the trickiness of that word and of some of the Hebrew and Greek expressions it translates. Its problem is the range of human attitudes or emotions that it can cover, and the consequences that can issue from them.[[159]](#footnote-160)

* Pride can denote a proper self-esteem or self-respect that recognizes our characteristics, position, and gifts. Assyria might have come to such an estimate (31:3–9; Rom cf. 12:3).
* But pride can issue in a trust in our position and gifts that makes us ignore the implications of their having been given to us, not generated by us (16:15; cf. 1 Cor 4:7).
* It can denote an improper conceit, vanity, arrogance, or self-importance that issues from such an (accurate) understanding of our position and who we are (31:10; cf. Rom 12:16).
* It can denote a presumption or effrontery that exaggerates our importance and becomes fanciful about it (so here in 28:2; and compare that story about Herod in Acts 12:21–23).
* Even if we have not fallen into one of those traps, we may be cut down from our height because it obscures God’s. He fells high trees because they are high (17:24; cf. Luke 1:52).

### Selected Bibliography

Arbel, Daphne. “Questions about Eve's Iniquity, Beauty, and Fall: The "Primal Figure'' in Ezekiel 28:11–19 and Genesis Rabbah Traditions of Eve.” *JBL* 124 (2005): 641–55.

*–––* "‘Seal of Resemblance, Full of Wisdom, and Perfect in Beauty’: The Enoch/ Metatron Narrative of 3 Enoch and Ezekiel 28.” *Harvard Theological Review* 98 (2005): 121–42.

Barr, James. “‘Thou Art the Cherub’: Ezekiel 28.14 and the Post-Ezekiel Understanding of Genesis 2–3.” In Barr, *Bible and Interpretation: The Collected Essays of James Barr* 2:220–28. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.

Callender, Dexter E. *Adam in Myth and History: Ancient Israelite Perspectives on the Primal Human.* Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2000.

Cook. Stephen L. “Creation Archetypes and Mythogems in Ezekiel: Significance and Theological Ramifications.” *Society of Biblical Literature 1999 Seminar Papers,* 123–46. Atlanta: SBL, 1999.

Day, John. “The Daniel of Ugarit and Ezekiel and the Hero of the Book of Daniel.” *VT* 30 (1980): 174–84.

Gordon, Robert P. “The Gods Must Die: A Theme in Isaiah and Beyond.” In [Michaël van der Meer](https://brill.com/search?f_0=author&q_0=Micha%C3%ABl+van+der+Meer), [Percy van Keulen](https://brill.com/search?f_0=author&q_0=Percy+van+Keulen), [Wido Th. van Peursen](https://brill.com/search?f_0=author&q_0=Wido+Th.+van+Peursen), and [Bas Ter Haar Romeny](https://brill.com/search?f_0=author&q_0=Bas+Ter+Haar+Romeny), *Isaiah in Context: Studies in Honour of Arie van der Kooij on the Occasion of his Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, 45–61. VTSup 138. Leiden: Brill, 2010.

Kang, Bin. “Rhetoric of Honour and Shame in Understanding the Fate of the King of Tyre in Ezek 28:1–19.” *OTE* 34 (2021): 849–70.

Launderville, Dale. “Ezekiel's Cherub: A Promising Symbol or a Dangerous Idol?” *CBQ* 65 (2003): 165–83.

Lee, Lydia. “The Tyrian King in MT and LXX Ezekiel 28:12b–15.” *Religions* 12/91 (2021).

*–––* “‘You Were the (Divine) Cherub’: A Potential Challenge to Yhwh’s Sole Divinity in Ezekiel 28.14.” *JSOT* 41 (2016): 99–116.

Litwa, M. David. *Desiring Divinity: Self-deification in Early Jewish and Christian Mythmaking*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2016.

Mihăilă, Alexandru. “Temple and Paradise: Some Remarks on the Dynamics of Sacred Place.” *Review of Ecumenical Studies Sibiu* 13 (2021): 145–59.

Miller-Naudé, Cynthia L., and Jacobus A. Naudé. “Textual Interrelationships Involving the Septuagint Translations of the Precious Stones in the Breastpiece of the High Priest.” *HTS* 76/4 (2020).

Nevader, Madhavi. “Creating a *Deus Non Creator*: Divine Sovereignty and Creation in Ezekiel.” In Paul M. Joyce and Dalit Rom-Shiloni, ed., *The God Ezekiel Creates,* 55–70. LHBOTS 607. London: T&T Clark, 2015.

*–––* “Yhwh and the Kings of Middle Earth: Royal Polemic in Ezekiel’s Oracles against the Nations.” In Else K. Holt, Hyun Chul Paul Kim, and Andrew Mein, ed., *Concerning the Nations: Essays on the Oracles against the Nations in Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel*, 161–78. LHBOTS 612. London: T&T Clark, 2015.

Noort, Ed. “Gan-Eden in the Context of the Mythology of the Hebrew Bible.” In Gerard P. Luttikhuizen, ed., *Paradise Interpreted: Representations of Biblical Paradise in Judaism and Christianity*, 21–36. Leiden: Brill, 1999.

Osborne, William R. "Wisdom Gets 'Tyred' in the Book of Ezekiel." In Mark J. Boda, Russell L. Meek, and William R. Osborne, ed., *Riddles and Revelations: Explorations into the Relationship between Wisdom and Prophecy in the Hebrew Bible*, 109–23. LHBOTS 634. London: T&T Clark, 2018.

Patmore, Hector M. *Adam, Satan, and the King of Tyre: The Interpretation of Ezekiel 28:11–19 in Late Antiquity.* . Leiden: Brill, 2012.

*–––* “Did the Masoretes Get it Wrong? The Vocalization and Accentuation of Ezekiel xxviii 12–19.” *VT* 58 (2008): 245–57.

Rom-Shiloni, Dalit. “Ezekiel and Jeremiah: What Might Stand Behind the Silence?” HeBAI 1 (2012): 203–230.

Sedlmeier, Franz. “Wider die Selbstvergottung: Der Fürst von Tyrus und sein Selbstverständnis nach Ez 28,1–10.” In Renate Brandscheidt und Theresia Mende, ed., *Schöpfungsplan und Heilsgeschichte: Festschrift für Ernst Haag zum 70. Geburtstag,* 271–97. Trier: Paulinus, 2002.

Stordalen, Terje. *Echoes of Eden. Genesis 2–3 and Symbolism of the Garden in Biblical Hebrew Literature.* Leuven: Peeters, 2001.

Strom, Mark R. “An Old Testament Background to Acts 12. 20–23.” *New Testament Studies* 32 (1986): 289–92.

Strong, John T. “Sitting on the Seat of God: A Study of Pride and Hubris in the Prophetic Corpus of the Hebrew Bible.” *Biblical Research* 56 (2011): 55–81.

Theocharous, Myrto. “Wealth and Dehumanization: Ezekiel’s Oracles Against Tyre.” In Steve Walton and Hannah Swithinbank, ed., *Poverty in the Early Church and Today: A Conversation*, 109–19. London: T&T Clark, 2019.

Tiemeyer, Lena-Sofia. “Zechariah’s Spies and Ezekiel’s Cherubim.” In Mark J. Boda and Michael Floyd, ed, *Tradition in Transition: Haggai and Zechariah 1-8 in the Trajectory of Hebrew Theology*, 104–27. LHBOTS 400. London: T&T Clark, 2008.

Vercruysse, Jean-Marc. “Les Pères de l'Église et Lucifer (Lucifer d'après Is 14 et Ez 28).” *Revue* *des* *Sciences* *Religieuses* 75 (2001): 147–74.

## Pharaoh the Dragon (29:1–16)

### Outline

There now begins the most extensive compilation of material concerning Israel’s neighbors. There are some 680 references to Egypt in the First Testament, which points to Egypt’s being of huge importance for First Testament theology (Sedlmeier, 2:71), and Egypt’s “long-term stability in the region” alone makes it not surprising that Ezekiel would have something to say about it (Ganzel 2020, 201). Ezek 29–32 comprises more messages about Egypt than appear in Jeremiah, who was preaching in Jerusalem when the question about Judah’s relationship with Egypt was politically and religiously critical, and who lived there later.[[160]](#footnote-161) Ezekiel evidently saw the question of Judahite attitudes to Egypt as crucial for the Kebarites, too, though Yahweh’s sovereignty in relation to Egypt and its kings will also be crucial in the Hellenistic period (Pohlmann, 445–47). In Ezekiel’s context, his message would again adopt a stance that fortuitously would reassure rather than antagonize any Babylonian authorities that took any notice of Judahite attitudes. For Judah, the problem is Judah aligning itself with “chaos,” the forces of disorder.[[161]](#footnote-162)

Like the Tyre messages, the Egypt messages begin with a date, as will six further messages in 29:1–32:32. The first Egypt message parallels the last Tyre message in focusing on the king without naming him, and on his presumptuous riff on his own greatness. Critique and threat interweave in 29:1–16, which sometimes marks the critiques with “on account of” (יַעַן; 29:6b, 9b) and sometimes marks the threats with “therefore” (לָכֵן; 29:8, 10). It also incorporates a series of declarations of Yahweh’s purpose, that people should acknowledge him (29:6a, 9a, 16). Distinctively and surprisingly, it promises Egypt a restoration after its wasting and its people’s dispersing, though it will be a restoration to a less eminent position than the one Egypt often held.

The sequence comprises four successive related short units. They name no addressee after the first, apparently presupposing the same addressee (Zimmerli, 2:109). The third unit develops motifs from the preceding two, while the fourth develops motifs from the second and third, which offers hints about the process of composition and makes for a comparison with sections such as 2:45–21:32 [21:1–37] (Greenberg, 2:609). Perhaps the third and fourth units are messages from a little time after 587 taking up motifs from the units that precede (Allen, 2:104).

The section thus unfolds:

Introductions (29:1–3aα)

Critique, threat, and purpose (“they will acknowledge”) (29:3aβ–6a)

Further critique (“on account of”), threat (“therefore”), and purpose (“they will acknowledge”) (29:6b–9a)

Further critique (“on account of”) and threat (“therefore”) (29:9b–12)

Explanation (“because”), promise, and purpose (“they will acknowledge”) (29:13–16)

In the medieval chapter division in printed Bibles, 29:17–21 continues from 29:1–16 and belongs with it, and read in this connection, it confirms the threat of 29:1–16.[[162]](#footnote-163) But 29:17–21 has a date of its own, which suggests a new beginning, and MT makes it a separate section with a petuhah\* on either side. Following it, 30:1–16 has a heading that marks it as a separate message, but doesn’t have its own date, which encourages readers to relate 29:17–21 at least as much to what follows as to what precedes, and we will consider 29:17–21 along with 30:1–16. But it faces both ways.

### Translation

1In the tenth year, in the tenth [month], on the twelfth of the month, Yahweh’s message came to me: 2My man, set your face against Pharaoh, king of Egypt. Prophesy against him and against Egypt, all of it. 3Speak and say, the Lord Yahweh has said this.

Here am I, against you,

Pharaoh, king of Egypt,

Big monster,

sprawling among its Nile channels,[[163]](#footnote-164)

That has said, “My Nile is mine,”

and “I myself made it for me.”[[164]](#footnote-165)

4I will put hooks in your jaws

and stick the fish in your channels to your scales.

I will make you go up from among your channels

with all the fish in your channels

that stick to your scales,

5And I will abandon you into the wilderness,

you and all the fish in your channels.

Falling on the face of the open country,

you will not be collected and not be gathered.

To the creatures of the earth and to the birds of the heavens

I am giving you as food.

6And all the people who live in Egypt will acknowledge

that I am Yahweh.

On account of their being a support made of reed

to Israel’s household:

7When they grasped you[[165]](#footnote-166) in the palm, you would shatter,

and you would split apart every shoulder for them.

When they supported themselves on you, you would break,

and you would make all their hips stand for themselves.[[166]](#footnote-167)

8Therefore the Lord Yahweh has said this.

Here am I, causing a sword to come against you,[[167]](#footnote-168)

and cutting off from you human being and animal.

9The country of Egypt will become a desolation and a wasteland,

and they will acknowledge that I am Yahweh.

On account of the fact that he said, “The Nile is mine,”

and “I myself made it,”

10Therefore here am I,

towards you and towards your channels:

I will make the country of Egypt

into wasted wastelands,

Desolation from Migdol—Syene

and as far as the border of Kush.

11No human foot will pass through it,

no animal foot will pass through it,

and it will not abide[[168]](#footnote-169) for forty years.

12I will make the country of Egypt

a desolation among desolate countries.[[169]](#footnote-170)

Its cities among wasted cities,

they will be a desolation for forty years.

I will scatter Egypt among the nations,

disperse them among the countries.

13Because[[170]](#footnote-171) the Lord Yahweh has said this. At the end of forty years I will gather Egypt from the countries where they have scattered 14and bring about the restoration[[171]](#footnote-172) of Egypt. I will bring them back to the country of Pathros, onto the country of their origin.[[172]](#footnote-173) They will be a lowly kingdom there. 15Out of the kingdoms, it will be a lowly one. It will not exalt itself again over the nations. I will reduce them so that they do not rule over the nations. 16And for Israel’s household he[[173]](#footnote-174) will not again be an object of trust, bringing waywardness to mind in their turning after them. And they will acknowledge that I am the Lord[[174]](#footnote-175) Yahweh.

### Textual Notes

MT has markers\* after 29:7, 12, and 16.

**29:1** For “the twelfth of the month, LXX has “the first of the month.” We do not know the origin of the difference.

**29:4** LXX lacks “that stick to your scales.”

**29:5** For הַמִּדְבָּרָה, “into the wilderness,” LXX “with speed” implies מְהֵרָה (Hitzig, 224).

For תִּקָּבֵץ “be gathered,” a Cairo geniza ms has תקבר “be buried” (*BHS*); cf. NRSV. But קָבַץ itself can imply collecting for burial (cf. Jer 8:2; 25:33; *HUB*).

**29:7** Q has בַּכַּף, , “in the palm,” correcting K בכפך “in your palm,” which doesn’t make sense and might be assimilation to the preceding בְּךָ.

For וְהַעֲמַדְתָּ, “you would make [all their hips] stand for themselves” (cf. Rashi, in MG; *CTAT*, 242–44 has “paralyze”), LXX has “break,” Vg., Syr, “loosen,” implying וְהִמְעַדְתָּ.

**29:10** For לְחָרְבוֹת חֹרֶב, “into wasted wastelands,” LXX “into a wilderness and a sword” (cf. Vg.) implies חֶרֶב for חֹרֶב.

**29:13** LXX lacks the כִּי, “because,” and some EVV omit it or translate it by words such as “yet” or “further.” I take it as having its usual causal significance, albeit a subtle or elliptical\* one.

**29:14** For וַהֲשִׁבֹתִי, “I will bring back,” LXX “I will cause them to live” (cf. Vg.) implies וְהוֹשַׁבְתִּי (cf. 26:20!).

**29:15** For רְדוֹת, “rule,” LXX “be more numerous” implies רְבוֹת (Hitzig, 225).

### Verse-by-Verse Commentary

**29:1–3aα** The date falls between that given for the beginning of the siege (24:1) and that given for the first Tyre message (26:1). The first association suggests a connection with Egypt’s proving itself an unreliable ally to Judah (29:6b–7) and suggests that the message is a response to events in Judah. Presumably Pharaoh and the rest of Egypt will never hear it, but it might still be Yahweh’s means of acting as Ezekiel pronounces the critique and the threat. More certainly, it will be a response designed to help the Kebarites in their thinking about events (Block, 2:134). The second association is more complicated if the date in 26:1 has a different starting point from this one and this message actually came later than that one. But rhetorically the arrangement whereby the Egypt messages follow the Tyre messages provides background to 29:17–20.

**29:3aβ** “Here am I against you,” Yahweh says, as he first said it to Judah, then to Tyre and Sidon (5:8; 26:3, 22). His subsequent words make for comparison and contrast with the Tyre messages. The Egypt messages begin by addressing the king and eventually go on to the people, and the king has prominence as the object of critique and threat all the way through. Both aspects contrast with the Tyre messages. In both contexts, the kings have no name, whereas in both contexts the king of Babylon is named. In both contexts, the characterization of the king relates to the physical and geographical context of his country—harbors for Tyre and river for Egypt. As a description of Pharaoh, “monster” (תַּנִּים) has several connotations. It might make the Kebarites think of jackals, wolves, or foxes scrabbling around and making their home in the wilds or in ruins (e.g., Jer 49:33; 51:37). But the plural word has a singular adjective, “big,” which might make the Kebarites think more in terms of a mythical monster, a dragon (תַּנִּין; Isa 27:1). Further, that word can denote a snake (e.g., Psa 91:13) or a big sea creature such as a whale (e.g., Gen 1:21), or in connection with Egypt, a crocodile (e.g., Isa 51:9). Ezekiel works with several of these connotations in his portrayal of Pharaoh.[[175]](#footnote-176) His critique is that the supposedly powerful monster is just lying about. It recalls the description of Rahab in Isa 30:7 (רַהַב), which stands for Egypt, sitting about doing nothing when Judah needs it to act.

**29:3b** In both contexts, a key basis for critiquing the king is his presumption related to the real assets and achievements of his people, as if the king of Tyre is a deity or as if Pharaoh created the Nile. If we take Pharaoh to be referring to the humanly-made Nile irrigation system with its “channels,” his claim to have made it will look less ridiculous, but at least as likely he is referring to the Nile’s natural channels in the Delta (Joyce, 181). The more usual meaning of his statement translated “I myself made it for me” would be “I myself made me” (see the translation footnote). This claim might seem even more absurd, but might look reasonable in the context of some Egyptian assumptions about king and deity.[[176]](#footnote-177) However the Kebarites understood the implausible Pharaonic claims, Ezekiel’s snide description of the monster sprawling about would subvert them.

**29:4–6a** In both contexts, the threat relates to his country’s apparent strength. The ship sinks and the dragon gets hauled out of the river, though Ezek 28 combines natural forces (the shipwreck) and Yahweh’s own action, whereas Ezek 29 focuses on Yahweh’s action. The fish will stand for the Pharaoh’s people, the Egyptian people, or perhaps for his allies. There would be nothing worse for a crocodile and a school of fish than being abandoned in a wilderness, where they would inevitably die (Altschuler in MG, in his comment on 32:2). Perhaps not being collected or gathered hints at the idea the fish might fulfill their destiny in being garnered so that they can be turned into nice fish dinners for people. They will be animal food instead. Or perhaps literal reality pokes through the imagery here: Pharaoh and his army will be slaughtered and left unburied.

**29:6b–7** Ezekiel goes on to a different critique, though with some of his typical ambiguity or capacity to raise eyebrows. Like other prophets, Ezekiel is inclined to confront Judah over turning to other countries for support as it resists Babylonian sovereignty, and specifically over turning to Egypt (e.g., Ezek 16; 17). The deeper reason for the challenge is that Israel is supposed to rely on Yahweh, but one of the prophets’ reasons was that the Egyptians would be unreliable. Here Ezekiel chides Pharaoh on that basis. Don’t look to Egypt for “support” (מִשְׁעֶנֶת), the word in Isa 36:6–7 describing Egypt as a support or crutch made of “reed” (קָנֶה). It might look firm and upright but it would collapse if you leant on it, and incidentally hurt you. Don’t support yourself on something so fragile or dangerous, Ezekiel says, using the same related verb meaning “support” (שָׁעַן) as Isa 30:12; 31:1. In both contexts, the critique relates to the unreliability of the object of trust: Tyre experiences shipwreck and Egypt is a support that fails. In the historical context, Jer 34 and 37 refer to Pharaoh Hophra beginning to provide some support for Judah. It is in his interests to drive Nebuchadrezzar out of the region he wants to control. And he does cause Nebuchadrezzar to withdraw from Jerusalem. But he pulls back, and frees Nebuchadrezzar to resume his campaign. Ironically, again, perhaps Egypt’s being unreliable was its way of serving Yahweh.

**29:8–9a** Ezekiel speaks with ever-changing rhetoric. He has referred to Pharaoh and the people of Egypt (pl.). Here he speaks of the country (sg.) and refers to it in more literal imagery, though it is still imagery and it still involves hyperbole.\*

**29:9b–12** In this third unit, Yahweh switches back to the basis for critique in the first (29:3) and combines it with the kind of threat that appeared in the second (29:8–9a). Migdol (cf. Exod 14:2; Jer 44:1) lies at the far northeast of the country, and Syene (Aswan) lies at the far south, so these places are an Egyptian equivalent of Dan to Beersheba. Beyond Syene is Kush, for which LXX and Vg. have Ethiopia, but in modern terms the country immediately south of Aswan is Sudan. Yahweh threatens catastrophe for Egypt of the same kind as he threatens for Judah. It’s one of the ways in which Egypt and Israel are alike as well as unlike.[[177]](#footnote-178) It will mean the devastation that war brings, and the emptiness that comes from a conquering army carrying off as forced migrants the people they don’t kill. The trouble will last forty years, like Judah’s long ago sojourn in the wilderness, enough time for an entire generation to pass. It will be a greater devastation than that of any other country, its cities wasted more than any other country’s cities. As usual, the threat of such complete devastation, emptying, and deportation involve hyperbole. It isn’t realistic (Zimmerli, 2:114).

**29:13–14aα** Yahweh’s “because” (כִּי) picks up the significance of the references to “forty years” in 29:11–12. Like “seventy years,” it suggests a long time, beyond the lifetime of most people who might hear this threat, but a time that will have an end. In this sense it is a less horrifying threat than the one given to Tyre (26:21; 27:36; 28:19) and more like Yahweh’s declarations about Sodom (16:53–55). Disaster will not be the end, and here is how, that there will be a limit to Egypt’s exile, paralleling the limit to Judah’s exile. Yahweh extends the analogy with Judah. Instead of ensuring that the Egyptians will not be collected (29:5), he himself will “collect” them (יקָבַץ piel) from where they have “scattered” (פּוּץ niphal), as he will the collect the Israelites who have scattered (11:17).[[178]](#footnote-179) He will bring about a restoration of them as a people (וְשַׁבְתִּי אֶת שְׁבוּת), as he will of Israel (16:53). He will bring them back to their land (שׁוּב hiphil), as he will bring the Israelites back (34:16). Ezekiel’s promise parallels Jer 46:26, though Isa 19:16–25 goes much further.

**29:14aβ–15** There is a difference over against his treatment of Judah. Yahweh is not being universalist in the sense of treating everyone the same. Or one might compare Yahweh’s undertaking with his original one to Israel, where the survival of a remnant turned out to be not really a positive idea at all (e.g., 5:1–4). Pathros denotes southern Egypt (Upper Egypt), and the description of it as “the country of their origin” (מְכוּרָתָם) might suggest an awareness that southern Egypt developed before the delta area in the north (cf. Herodotus, *Histories* 2.4). But that had happened millennia previously and one may wonder whether Ezekiel would know about it. More likely “the country of their origin” signifies Egypt in general, as the expression refers to Jerusalem in general in 16:3 and Babylon in general in 21:30 [35]. If Pathros as an area within the country of the Egyptians’ origin, then, the good news suggested by the latter expression is anticipatorily qualified by the revelation that they will be returning to Pathros, only to the south rather than to the country as a whole or to the north where the capital was in Ezekiel’s day. The implication might be that they will return to a modest location away from the political center (Zimmerli, 2:115), though another significance of Pathros and of Migdol and Syene might be that these are locations where there were Jewish communities (e.g., Isa 49:12; Jer 44:1). One might again wonder, however, whether Judahites in Kebar would recognize such implications. One way or another, a limitation to Pathros will mean that the restored Egypt “will be a lowly kingdom,” one of the lower ones of its day, incapable of any more aspiration to being the major regional power it has been.

**29:16** Yahweh is thus not merely continuing a chastisement of Egypt but safeguarding against Israel ever again being tempted to make Egypt an object of trust (מִבְטָח). The theme, though not the wording, picks up from 29:6b–7 and its links with Isa 36:4–9, where the Assyrian general urged Hezekiah not to put his trust (בָּטַח) on Egypt, the support that would shatter.

### Biblical Theology Comments

The English word Satan is derived from the Greek word Σατανᾶς, which is derived from the Hebrew word שָׄטָן. But whereas the English and Greek words refer to the Devil, the Hebrew word does not. It is a slightly poetic but ordinary word for an adversary. Although the First Testament thus does not use the word to refer to a being who is the embodiment of evil, this doesn’t mean that the First Testament has no idea of a being who is the embodiment of evil. It has words other than שָׄטָן to refer to it. One is the monster commonly referred to as תַּנִּין, but as תַּנִּים in Ezek 29:3. In Isa 27:1 תַּנִּין is לִוְיָתָן, Leviathan, also described as a serpent or snake. All these terms make the entity that embodies evil into a horrible animal rather than something like a human person, a thing rather than a he or she. The First Testament sees Yahweh having defeated and disempowered this monster, at creation or at the Red Sea (Psa 74:12–14). Yet it also knows that evil still asserts itself and that Yahweh will need to attend to it and slay it (Isa 27:1). The New Testament adds that God did defeat evil through Jesus’ cross and resurrection, but that he still needs to do so at the End. And thus Ezekiel recognizes that evil is active now in someone like Pharaoh. Kings or presidents or pastors can be “resemblances of Satan” (Greenhill, 629).

### Application and Devotional Implications

Yahweh’s closing words here presuppose that “God's own people are apt to confide in an arm of flesh” (Greenhill, 636), to trust in human resources. The expression “arm of flesh” comes from 2 Chr 32:8, where resisting the temptation to trust in an arm of flesh is part of Hezekiah’s challenge to his people in the context of an Assyrian attack on Jerusalem. Assyrian pressure is also the context of the emphasis on trust in Yahweh that features in Isa 36:4–7. Ironically, when Isaiah himself elsewhere also emphasizes trust (e.g., 30:1–3; 31:1–3), it looks as if the background is Hezekiah’s own backing a policy that does trust in an arm of flesh—namely, in Egypt, the temptation in Jerusalem in Ezekiel’s day. Which makes one infer that talking about trust is one thing, but exercising trust is another.

### Selected Bibliography

Aḥituv, Shmuel. "Ezekiel and Egypt." In Mordechai Cogan and Dan’el Kahn (ed.), *Treasures on Camels' Humps: Historical and Literary Studies from the Ancient Near East Presented to Israel Eph‘al,* 21–25. Jerusalem: Magnes, 2008.

Boyd, Samuel L. “Mirror Images: The Role of Egypt in Ezek 29–32.” *Hebrew Studies* 62 (2021): 207–29.

Crouch, Carly L. “Ezekiel’s Oracles against the Nations in Light of a Royal Ideology of Warfare.” *JBL* 130 (2011): 473–92.

Guillaume, Philippe. “Metamorphosis of a Ferocious Pharaoh.” *Biblica* 85 (2004): 232–36.

Kim, Brittany. “A Dragon, a Reed Staff, and a Towering Cedar in Eden: Egypt in Ezekiel 29–32.” In Steed Vernyl Davidson and Daniel Timmer, ed., *Prophetic Otherness: Constructions of Otherness in Prophetic Literature*, 126–50. LHBOTS 687. London: T&T Clark, 2021.

Marzouk, Safwat. *Egypt as a Monster in the Book of Ezekiel*. FAT 2.76. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015.

van Rooy, Herrie F. “Egypt in Exile: A Deuteronomic/Deuteronomistic Judgement in the Book of Ezekiel?” In Hans Ausloos and Bénédicte Lemmelijn, ed., *A Pillar of Cloud To Guide: Text-Critical, Redactional, and Linguistic Perspectives on the Old Testament in Honour of Marc Vervenne*, 233–46. BETL 269. Leuven: Peeters, 2014.

*–––* “Ezekiel’s Prophecies against Egypt and the Babylonian Exiles.” In *Proceedings of the World Congress of Jewish Studies Division A: The Bible and its World* 1989, 115–22. Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies, 1990.

Strine, Casey A., and Carly L. Crouch. “Yhwh’s Battle against Chaos in Ezekiel: The Transformation of Judahite Mythology for a New Situation.” *JBL* 132 (2013): 883–903.

Yoder, Tyler R. “Ezekiel 29:3 and Its Ancient Near Eastern Context.” *VT* 63 (2013): 486–96.

## The Service and the Reward (29:17–30:19)

### Outline

A new message with a new date begins at 29:17. Having a new date works against its being part of the same section as 29:1–16, though we have noted in the Outline to 29:1–16 that it can be illuminatingly read in light of what precedes it there. Its date is much later than the general run of dates in Ezekiel, and thus also much later than the fall of Jerusalem, which is otherwise the chronological and dramatic framework of the Egypt messages. In this later context, Yahweh reaffirms the intention to put Egypt down, and now says he will do it by giving Egypt over to Nebuchadrezzar as compensation for his having to abandon his attempt to take Tyre—the event to which the date relates.

30:1 begins with an introduction marking as another distinct message that continues through to 30:19, until there is another introduction to a message, with another date. But it 30:1–19 is unique in the Egypt chapters in being a complete message with no date. On one hand, then, being a complete message separates it from 29:17–21, but on the other, lacking a date links it with 29:17–21. The arrangement suggests taking 29:17–30:19 as one section that comprises two units (cf. Sweeney, 147). The first declares and reaffirms Yahweh’s intention regarding Egypt and regarding Nebuchadrezzar. The second reaffirms the intention regarding Egypt and does so in inescapable detail.

The absence of a date for 30:1–19 and of any concrete references that would enable one to guess at its context makes it an open question whether 30:1–19 had its origin around the time of the fall of Jerusalem, like the bulk of the Egypt material, or whether its origin lies in the date given by 29:17. Read in that earlier context, the collocation of the messages means that 29:17–21 now provides further reason for believing that Yahweh will do as he says in 30:1–19, even though many years have passed regarding the Egypt undertakings as well as the Tyre undertakings. Read following on 29:17–21, it works out of the implications of that undertaking.

The only person 29:17–21 addresses is Ezekiel. It contains no “you” apart from the prophet, and Yahweh does not commission him to share it with anyone. Its last verse gives two further clues to its significance in the context. The message relates to Israel’s future, and to Ezekiel’s vindication as a prophet. Nebuchadrezzar’s failure had also been the failure of Ezekiel’s threats. So Yahweh will kill several birds with one stone in taking action against Egypt. He will pay Nebuchadrezzar his wages, put down the imperial pretensions of Egypt, take a step in rebuilding Israel, vindicate Ezekiel, and cause people to acknowledge himself.

The message in 30:1–19 complements 29:1–16 and 29:17–21 in comprising simply threat with no critique and in speaking of the nation of a whole rather than its ruler. Ezek 29–30 together thus compare with Ezek 26–28 in combining these features between them.

After the introduction to 30:1–19, the first paragraph (30:2b–9) emphasizes the “day” that is coming on Egypt, in a way recalling the earlier threat of a day coming on Judah—an end, nations, a sword, desolation, the downfall of people who take pride pride in their strength (7:1–27). Yes, Egypt will be put down like Judah. The paragraph also describes the devastation that will affect the world around Egypt, the world of Egypt’s allies or its empire, as well as Egypt itself. “Ezekiel draws a map of judgment in which the several regions of Upper and Lower Egypt,” its great cities, and the surrounding territories are all covered. “There will be no place to hide” (Clements, 136).

The second paragraph (30:10–12) makes specific that Yahweh’s agent in this work of destruction will be Nebuchadrezzar. In this context it explicitly takes up from the commitment in 29:17–21. In the way it speaks, it also reflects earlier threats of action against Tyre and against the Nile channels.

The third paragraph (30:13–19) comprises a declaration about devastation throughout Egypt. Only in this third paragraph does Ezekiel move to the destruction of Egypt as opposed to the slaughter of Egypt and its allies (Odell, 384). Its account of the sweeping effect of Yahweh’s action throughout the country takes up and expands on the references to particular towns in 30:2–9, jumping around the country in the way it issues its threats. “The whole gives an impression of thorough and chaotic destruction” (Olley, 447). Whereas the first two paragraphs combine reference to Yahweh’s action and the action of his agents, this final paragraph gives all the “credit” to Yahweh in person. It coheres with this feature that the paragraph and thus the section almost close with another picture, the divine cloud covering the country, as well as another reference to Egypt’s “pride in its strength,” coming to an end (cf. 30:3, 6).

The section as a whole thus unfolds:

Introduction (29:17)

Explanation (29:18)

Threat: “therefore” the Lord Yahweh has said this (29:19–20)

An affirmation of the Lord Yahweh (29:20)

“On that day”: promise for Israel and for Ezekiel (29:21)

And they will acknowledge (29:21)

Introduction (30:1–2a)

Exhortation to wail in light of the coming day (30:2b–9)

The Lord Yahweh has said this (30:2)

Yahweh has said this (30:6)

An affirmation of the Lord Yahweh (30:6)

And they will acknowledge (30:8)

“On that day”: renewed warning (30:9)

Declaration about the coming of Nebuchadrezzar (30:10–12)

The Lord Yahweh has said this (30:10)

I Yahweh have spoken (30:12)

A declaration about devastation through Egypt (30:13–19)

The Lord Yahweh has said this (30:13)

And they will acknowledge (30:19)

### Translation

17Then[[179]](#footnote-180) in the twenty-seventh year, in the first [month], on the first of the month, Yahweh’s message came to me: 18My man, whereas Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon, has made his force engage in great service in relation to Tyre, every head made bald and every shoulder scraped,but there has been no profit for him or for his force from Tyre, for the service in which it engaged against it, 19Therefore the Lord Yahweh has said this. Here am I, giving Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon the country of Egypt. He will carry off its horde,[[180]](#footnote-181) take its loot, and seize its plunder. It will be compensation for his force, 20as I am giving him the country of Egypt as his wage for which he served, in that they acted for me (an affirmation of the Lord Yahweh).

21On that day I will grow a horn for Israel’s household, and give you an opening of your mouth among them, and they will acknowledge that I am Yahweh.

30:1Yahweh’s message came to me: 2My man, prophesy and say, the Lord Yahweh has said this.

Howl, “Oh, about the day!”—

3because a day is near.

A day of Yahweh is near,

a day of cloud.

When it will be a time of nations,

4and a sword will come in Egypt.

There will be shivering in Kush

when people fall slain in Egypt.[[181]](#footnote-182)

People will take its horde,

and its foundations will collapse.

5Kush, Put, Lud,

the entire ethnic group, Kub,

A covenant country’s people with them,

by the sword they will fall.

6Yahweh has said this.

So the people who sustain Egypt will fall,

and its pride in its strength will flounder.

As they will fall in it by the sword

from Migdol—Syene (an affirmation of the Lord Yahweh).

7They will be desolate among desolate countries

and his cities among cities, wasted they will be.[[182]](#footnote-183)

8And they will acknowledge that I am Yahweh

when I put fire in Egypt

and all its allies break up.

9On that day,

envoys will go out from my presence in ships,

To make Kush shake [in its] confidence,

and there will be shivering in them,

On Egypt’s day,

because there, it is coming.

10The Lord Yahweh has said this:

And I will put an end to the horde of Egypt

by the hand of Nebuchadrezzar, king of Babylon,

11he and his people with him,

As the most terrifying of nations

are being brought to ravage the country.

They will empty their swords on Egypt,

and fill the country with the slain.

12I will make channels into dry ground

and sell the country into the hand of dire people.

I will make the country desolate,

and what fills it, by the hand of foreigners.

I Yahweh have spoken.

13The Lord Yahweh has said this.

I will eliminate the lumps

and make an end of the idols from Noph.

A prince from the country of Egypt

there will not be anymore.

I will put fear in the country of Egypt

14and make Pathros desolate.

I will put fire in Zoՙan

and act on rulings against No֨.

15I will pour my fury on Sin,

Egypt’s stronghold.

I will cut off the horde of No՚

16and put fire in Egypt.

Sin will writhe and writhe,

No՚ will be for tearing apart,

and Noph—adversaries by day.[[183]](#footnote-184)

17The young men of ՚Aven and Pi-beset,

they will fall by the sword.

And these, into captivity they will go,

18while in Tehapnehes the day has held back,

As I break there the yokes of Egypt,

and its pride in its strength comes to an end.

It, cloud will cover it,

and its daughters will go into captivity.

19So I will act on rulings in Egypt

and they will acknowledge that I am Yahweh.

### Textual Notes

MT has markers\* after 29:20, 21; 30:5, 9, 12, 19.

**29:19** LXX lacks “carry off its horde.”

**29:20** LXX lacks the slightly enigmatic אֲשֶׁר עָשׄוּ לֵי “in that they have acted for me.”

**30:2b–4** LXX has a shorter version of these lines.

**30:5** For Kush, Put, Lud, and Kub, LXX has Persians, Cretans, Lydians, and Lybians. For “the ethnic group” (הָעֶרֶב), Aq., Sym., Syr. have “Arabia,” implying הָעֲרָב, but the article is then odd.

**30:6** LXX lacks “Yahweh has said this.”

**30:9** For בַּצִִּים, “in ships,” LXX “rushing” (cf. Sym.) suggests אָצִים (Cornill, 369), which Theod. transliterates. LXX lacks “[in its] confidence.”

For בְּיוׄם “on [Egypt’s] day, KJV “as in [Egypt’s] day” follows Tg. and some medieval mss reading כְּיוׄם.[[184]](#footnote-185)

**30:12** LXX lacks “and sell the country.”

**30:13** LXXhas a shorter version of the verse, and for “idols” (אֱלִילִים) has “nobles,” suggesting אֵילִים (Cornill, 370); cf. 17:13; 32:21.

**30:15** For סִין, “Sin” LXX has Sais, not far away in the delta region. For נׄא, “No֨,” Thebes, LXX has Memphis, implying נׄף.

**30:16** For סִין, “Sin,” LXX this time has Syene (cf. 30:6).

חוּל תָּחול (תחיל for the latter in K), “writhe and writhe” represent verb forms that are presumably inf. abs. and *yiqtol*,\* but they are somewhat irregular (see BDB; GK 73d; Greenberg, 2:626).

For the elliptical\* וְנֹף צָרֵי יוֹמָם, “and Noph—adversaries by day,” LXX “waters will pour through” suggests something like וְנָפוׄצוּ מַיִם (Cooke, 337).

**30:17** For וְהֵנָּה, “and these” (f.) LXX has specifically “and the women.”

**30:18** For חָשַׄךְ “is holding back,” LXX, Vg., Tg. “is growing dark” implies חָשַׁךְ, the reading in some medieval mss (*BHS*).

For מׄטוׄת “yokes,” LXX, Vg. “scepters” implies מַטּוׄת.

### Verse-by-Verse Commentary

**29:17–20** The new message with its own introduction extraordinarily dates the message in 571, seventeen years later than 29:1, the latest date in the Ezekiel scroll. This message is the last one attributed to Ezekiel, who would now be fifty or so. In the blockade of Tyre, Nebuchadrezzar’s men have worn the hair off their heads and the skin off their shoulders, perhaps both physically (for instance, applying themselves to battering rams) and metaphorically. But the blockade has ended without Tyre’s destruction. It did involve some kind of submission by Tyre, whose king joined Jehoiachin in Babylon (see the verse-by-verse commentary on 28:17). Otherwise “we know frustratingly little about this siege.”[[185]](#footnote-186) The implication of the promise in 29:18–20 is that Nebuchadrezzar’s army gained little from the surrender. The problem is not that Ezekiel’s prophecy has not been fulfilled, or even that Yahweh’s promise has not been fulfilled, but that Yahweh has not paid his servant’s wages in accordance with the Torah and the Prophets (e.g., Deut 24:15; Jer 2:13; Luke 10:7). To make up for that, the promise about plunder that originally applied in connection with the attack on Tyre (26:12) is transferred to an attack on Egypt, which was always an ultimate aim of Nebuchadrezzar’s (Sweeney, 143). So the reason for placing here Yahweh’s undertaking to Nebuchadrezzar is that it relates to Egypt. It is one of the messages about disaster for Egypt (cf. Allen, 2:109). .

**29:21** To put two and two together, however, it is a the further implication of Nebuchadrezzar’s failure to destroy Tyre that Ezekiel’s declarations had not been fulfilled. How would the promise about “a horn for Israel’s household” then help him? For an animal such as an ox, its horn is the focus of its strength, a key to self-defense or to attacking another animal. It is thus an image for a nation’s strength (34:21). By the time indicated in 29:17, Yahweh has cut off Israel’s horn (Lam 2:3). Restoration will mean enabling Israel to grow a new horn, giving it back its strength (as Yahweh promises with regard to David’s line in Psa 132:17). So one could understand Yahweh as simply promising that “on that day,” the day when he gives Egypt over to Nebuchadrezzar, he will also restore Israel’s strength. Or he might be referring to a horn that pushes on Israel’s behalf, as Cyrus’s eventually will (cf. Qimhi, in MG). And Cyrus will have done his work by the time a generation and thus forty years have passed, and scattered Judahites have been able to return to Judah. Ezekiel will therefore be able to speak, because Yahweh has fulfilled his commitment (cf. 16:63; Odell, 377–78).

But it is unlikely that Ezekiel was still alive then and therefore able to open his mouth with new confidence and plausibility on the basis of his message having been fulfilled. In a shorter time frame, Yahweh’s declaration again found only partial fulfilment when Nebuchadrezzar did invade Egypt but did not “carry off its horde, take its plunder, and seize its spoil” (see Greenberg, 2:617). Yet that points readers to the way “that day” and the motif of a horn have a reference going beyond something coming about in the ordinary course of events. They have an “eschatological” reference (Joyce, 182). *B. Sanh.* 98a thus associates this promise about a horn with the Messiah’s coming. Yahweh is renewing to Ezekiel a bigger promise about a horn for Israel’s household.

Further, while it is Ezekiel whom Yahweh is addressing in 30:21, one needs continually to bear in mind that the reason Ezekiel says things and puts them in the Ezekiel scroll (or why a curator does) is not their significance for Ezekiel. It is their significance for the Kebarites or later Judahites. Ezekiel is confident about declaring what Yahweh intends to do, and they need to accept what he says. It is intriguing, however, that after Yahweh gives him this promise about speaking further, chronologically he did not actually say anything further that appears in his scroll. If he brought the scroll into being when he was in his fifties because he had better do it while he had the chance, perhaps he was right. But in terms of the scroll, the promises in Ezek 36–48 are a working out of this promise and an expression of this freedom.

**30:1–3bα** Ezekiel now introduces a new message in his regular way, except for ust lack of a date like all the other Egypt messages. It thus functions as a follow-on to 29:17–21. The exhortation to unidentified people to “Howl” (יָלַל hiphil) is unique. Yahweh had urged Ezekiel to howl in light of the catastrophe coming on Jerusalem (21:12). Is it the Kebarites who are to howl, or the peoples to be named in the verses that follow? But the point about the exhortation is to announce the horrifying nature of what Yahweh is planning. “He instills terror in everything he said” (Theodoret, 201). Out of the context in the scroll, this exhortation by Ezekiel could easily be another warning to Jerusalemites about the day of disaster coming to them. Without clarifying that point, Ezekiel conveys the threat’s seriousness through the repetition of the word “day” (יוׄם) with deepening soberness: “the day… a day is near… a day of Yahweh… a day of cloud.” The repetition and the motif of nearness recalls an earlier threat to Jerusalem. “The end is coming” (7:2): seven times there Yahweh goes on to refer to the “end,” eight times to its “coming,” and eventually three times to the “day.” With 13:5, the present declaration is one of the only two occasions that Ezekiel uses the phrase “day of Yahweh.” Thus whereas he has earlier followed prophets such as Amos and Zephaniah who denied that Yahweh’s day would mean good news for Israel and bad news for the nations, and declared that it would mean bad news for Israel, here (like those same prophets) he also affirms the truth in the declarations about other nations that Israel was too inclined to focus on. One might have expected “a day of Yahweh” to bring the repetitions in 30:2b–3 to their climax, but it is the cloud that does so. This is the cloud עָנָן)) that solemnly indicates and reveals the awesome and frightening presence of Yahweh (1:4). Yahweh is announcing an event that will bring the ultimate presence of Yahweh in a way that is horrifying for people against whom Yahweh intends to act. Here, the implication is not that it is eschatological in the sense that it is an event that will happen beyond empirical and present experience (cf. Sweeney, 148).

**30:3bβ–5** “Time” complements “day” as it does in the threat to Israel in 7:7. But the expression “a time of nations” is ambiguous. It might be a time when Yahweh takes action against nations or a time when he takes action through nations. It will be both. Yahweh will first clarify that some individual nations are his victims. There is another sense here in which Yahweh’s threat is not eschatological. It affects particular peoples in a particular context because of their association with Egypt. They will all fall with Egypt. Egypt is his key victim. A depersonalized sword will flail against it, once more recalling a threat against Judah (7:15; also 21:1–32). Unnamed attackers will “take its horde” as captives, and “its foundations will collapse.” The companion threat indicates how devastating the attack will be, whether it refers to the physical foundations of buildings that get set on fire and collapse, or to the country’s political foundations.

Beyond Egypt, the threat refers first to Kush (Sudan), Egypt’s nearest neighbor politically as well as geographically. It is the first nation one reaches as one cruises down the Nile, the nation from which Egypt’s rulers sometimes came, though also a nation with which Egypt was often in conflict (the equivalent to France for Britain). It won’t be surprising if trouble for Egypt produce a shiver in Kush, and more than a shiver: the word (חַלְחָלָה) comes from the verb (חוּל) meaning twist, writhe, or shudder. The shudder will reflect the interweaving of these two nations’ destinies. Kush thus gets two mentions, followed by one for Put (Libya, along the Mediterranean coast), one for Lud (Lydia in Turkey across the Mediterranean, with which Egypt had relations and from which mercenaries came to Egypt: see Zimmerli, 2:129), and one for Kub (unknown). The “ethnic group” (עֶרֶב) will cover mercenaries from other peoples. The “covenant country’s people” could apply to Judahite mercenaries or people from other nations in treaty alliance with Egypt. But for Ezekiel and the Kebarites, Israel is especially the covenant country, in two senses. It has a covenant/treaty relationship with Egypt, and it has a covenant relationship with the God who is uttering this threat. An incidental reference to Israel here would compare with the incidental reference in 27:17, but it might avoid dishonoring Judahites by treating them as just part of the mixed ethnic group (Zimmerli, 2:130).

**30:6–7** Yahweh restates the point. The “people who sustain Egypt” might be the neighbors and allies just listed, but the prediction that “its pride in its strength will flounder” may suggest more the nation’s internal support system, its government and administration, so that this declaration is another picture of the country’s foundations collapsing. Either way, there’s some irony, as Judah was always tempted to look to Egypt to support or sustain it (סָמַךְ). Ezekiel has already noted that Egypt was traditionally the crutch that Judah was inclined to lean on, its traditional object of trust (29:6–7, 16), instead of leaning on Yahweh (cf. Isa 26:3; 36:6; 48:2). Yahweh indirectly restates the point that Egypt was a support that could not be relied on, by noting that Egypt itself needed support and is also going to find that its support fails. Near the beginning of Part Four of the Ezekiel scroll Yahweh has already threatened to put paid to Judah’s (proper) “pride in its strength” (24:21). Here he does the same for Egypt with its pride in its strength, which is also in a sense proper. “From Migdol” in the northeast “to Syene” in the south (cf. 29:10) again covers the land as whole, and Ezekiel again hyperbolically\* describes the devastation as the worst that any country or city has ever experienced (cf. 29:12). Egypt “was a country that had seldom seen a foreign foe carrying all the horrors of war inside its own boundaries. As a result of its favoured position it had suffered only partial war damage while its neighbours underwent all the disasters of defeat, but now it is to be reduced to the same condition as the others, a desolation amid desolations” (Eichrodt, 416).

**30:8** When Yahweh states the aim that “they will acknowledge that I am Yahweh,” he unusually adds an extensive qualification to that intention. In this qualification the irony in his message is nearer the surface when he declares that all Egypt’s “allies” or helpers (עָזַר; Isa 30:5, 7; 31:1–3) will break. He restates the fact that the supposed source of support needs support, the source of help will need help, and it is about to lose it.

**30:9** While it is also usual for the statement of aim to be the end of a message, this version’s exceptional nature and the lack of an introduction to what now follows suggests that 30:9 is a footnote to 30:6–8 rather than a separate short message. It also pairs with 30:2b–3bα and thus brings 30:2b–9 to a close, as it adds two more references to the “day.” It will be “that day,” which can refer to Yahweh’s day, and here also picks up from 29:21. And it will be “Egypt’s day.” That is an expression with few parallels. While having a day can be good news, as is the case with Jezreel’s day (Hos 1:11 [2:2]), “Jerusalem’s day” (Psa 137:7) is not. The Kebarites among other Judahites in Babylonia will presumably soon be grieving Jerusalem’s day in the words of Psa 137, or have already been grieving it since 597. The context here makes clear that “Egypt’s day” again suggests that bad news for Jerusalem is complemented by bad news for other peoples in its world. Egypt’s day is “coming” (see 7:2, 5, 6, 7). At the moment Kush thinks that the world is in a settled state or that any disturbance to the world order will not reach it, many miles up the Nile. It is therefore living in a relaxed fashion, in “confidence” or trust (בֶּטַח)—another suggestive verbal link with Judah’s relationship with Egypt (see the verb בָּטַח in Isa 36:4–7). And so far, the Babylonians have indeed been focusing more on lands nearer home. But there will now be reason for Kush to shiver (cf. 30:4) and to shake (חָרַד), another word drawing attention to the physical manifestation of fear. Shaking and confidence appear as opposites with different implications in 34:28; 39:26, and in Lev 26:5–6, in Ezekiel’s favorite chapter (Greenberg, 2:623).

Ships sailing south on the Nile, the regular form of transport between north and south, are going to bring Yahweh’s envoys to Cush. Ezekiel’s message recalls a picture Isaiah once painted of envoys sailing the Nile in the course of negotiations between countries such as Sudan, Egypt, and Judah, discussions concerning whether and how to assert independence from Assyria (see Isa 18). Don’t bother, Isaiah said. The plan will get nowhere. Ezekiel again declares that the Kushites’ confidence, their sense of security, is erroneous, and he is implicitly advising his people to live in light of Isaiah’s message. Although an “envoy” (מַלְאָךְ) can be a supernatural figure, an angel, “envoys” (pl.) usually denotes human emissaries (as it did in Isa 18), and this meaning fits here, though they nevertheless come “from my presence.” Consciously or unconsciously (and in imagination or in literal reality) they are Yahweh’s agents bringing news of his action, news that Yahweh wants Cush to have of what he has been doing in Egypt. Yes, “Egypt’s day… is coming.”

**30:10–11** gives precision to 30:1–9 in a way that fits the section’s opening declaration in 29:17–21 (Theodoret, 203). In spelling out that prophecy (Eliezer, 104), it also compares with 26:7–14 following 26:1–6 (Block, 2:163). If the reference to Egypt’s day brought Yahweh’s message to semi-closure, Yahweh now moves on to a question that 30:9 did not answer. How will he bring about the fulfillment of his intention? His action against Egypt will again parallel his action against Judah. From Nebuchadrezzar’s angle, it will be an aspect of fulfilling the same aim as he has there, to have political and economic control of the area between Mesopotamia on one hand and Arabia and northeast Africa on the other. It will also parallel his action against Tyre, for the same reason. As he is ”bringing… the most terrifying of nations” to Tyre to “empty their swords” there (28:7), so in Egypt the “time of nations” (30:3) will be the time when “the most terrifying of nations are being brought to ravage the country” (the passive has Yahweh himself as the implicit agent), “empty their swords” there, and thus “put an end to the horde of Egypt” (to use an expression characteristic of the Egypt messages).

**30:12** Yahweh goes on to do more adapting of his threats to the particularities of Egypt. It doesn’t rain much in Egypt and the Nile channels are the key to the country’s life, so threatening their drying up is another way of threatening the death of the Egyptian people. For Yahweh to “sell” the country into the hands of dire people such as the Babylonians uses the verb (מָכַר) in a way that has abandoned its strict meaning (cf. Judg 2:14; 3:8). He’s going to give Egypt away. It might imply an insult: he will unload them, get rid of them, to “foreigners” (again, compare Ezek 28:7). Or it might toughen the threat. Given the drying up of the channels, Egypt will be like a company that finds its assets have become virtually worthless and that it has to sell them off. Egypt will need some way to buy the food it can no longer grow (Bowen, 187).

**30:13a** Noph is Memphis, one of Egypt’s capitals in northern Egypt, just south of Cairo, and the location of some Judahites just after 587 (Jer 44:1). Talk about terminating the worship of Egypt’s deities is a new move in the messages about the nations. “Lumps” and “idols” might be synecdoche for Egypt’s entire pantheon and religion, but it would do no harm for Yahweh to remind Judahites of his hostility to lumps and idols. His intention regarding such images is paralleled by his intention regarding a “prince” (נָשִׄיא), which parallels his intention regarding a “leader” or “king” of Tyre (28:2, 11), but also constitutes yet another recollection of Ezek 7 (see 7:27; also 12:8–15; 19:1–14; 21:25–27). Once again Yahweh is reassuring Judah of his intention to treat other nations as tough as he treats Judah. He will not tolerate the existence of either a rival deity or a rival sovereign.

**30:13b–18aα** Whereas 30:10–12 combined reference to Yahweh’s action and to the human agents through whom he works, 30:13–19 combines reference to Yahweh’s action and the experience of the victims of his action (Block, 2:165–66). The seven verses incorporate twelve verbs to underline the nature of the destruction as imposed amd experienced (Ganzel 2020, 205). Pathros as the name of southern Egypt pairs with Noph in the north. But in general, Ezekiel’s list of locations puts them in a random order, enhancing the sense of frightening chaos throughout a country that never knew where the next attack might come. Zoan or Tanis (not far from Avaris or Pi-Ramesses), in the northeast of Egypt, is a sometime capital, and Sin or Pelusium, an important harbor and frontier fortress (nothing to do with the English word “sin”) is also in the northeast.[[186]](#footnote-187) No֨ is Thebes (also the location of Karnak and now of Luxor), 500 miles south in southern Egypt, and a sometime capital. Aven (אָוֶן), now in Greater Cairo, is a mischievous misspelling of On (אוׄן; cf. Aq.) to make it sound like the Hebrew word for “trouble” or “wickedness,” possibly on the basis of its being a center for worship of the sun god (“Sun House” in Jer 43:13). Pi-beset (Bubastis, modern Basta) is nearby. “These” (f.) in 30:17 then likely refers to those two cities themselves. Tehapnehes (later Daphnae, now on the Suez Canal) is a variant spelling for Tahpanhes in the northeast, where Jeremiah lived (Jer 43:7–8). The image of the day holding back there suggests the arrival of Yahweh’s day with its darkness (32:7–8; cf. Amos 5:18–20; Isa 13:9–10). The survey as a whole parallels Jer 46:13–26 (evidently Judahite prophets could be quite knowledgeable about foreign geography) and asserts “the doom of the proud power of Egypt as seen in the fate of its most famous cities” (Eichrodt, 417).

**30:18aβ–19** As the series of places in 30:12–19 is random, so the series of words associated with the different places does not imply that a particular word relates to a particular place in a distinctive fashion. The destruction of lumps and idols will not apply just to Noph. Wasting, fire, and Yahweh’s implementing his rulings or decisions will not apply just to Pathros, Zoan, and No֨. Sin is not Egypt’s stronghold in a way that other places are not, and wrath will not fall on it more than on other places. No֨ will not experience a unique massacre or Sin a unique reason to writhe in pain and grief. Noph will not have distinctive adversaries or ֨Aven and Pi-beset a distinctive loss of its young or a distinctive forced migration, or Tehapnehes a distinctive failure of light or collapse into darkness (see the textual note). Ezekiel’s rhetoric woks by painting a series of the briefest concrete and specific pen pictures so that they come together into a horrifying picture of total destruction as Yahweh will “break there the yoke bars” whereby Egypt exercised control over its empire, and “its pride in its strength comes to an end” (cf. 30:6).

To put it more metaphorically, “cloud will cover it,” the cloud to which 30:3 referred. The threatening cloud of Yahweh’s action will lie behind the devastation Nebuchadrezzar brings. Egypt’s daughters might be the women who will be taken off as forced migrants when its men have been slaughtered, or they might be its daughter towns and villages that will be taken over when its cities have been destroyed. Yes, Yahweh had made some “rulings,” some decisions about what needs to happen, and he will implement them, and people will recognize it. “As all the centres of Egyptian defensive power fall one after another, the writer sees all human resistance disappear before the sole supremacy of the world-God, and thus provides his own people, who are also included in the judgment, with a guarantee that their fate does not depend on the right of the stronger, that pitiless root-principle of this worldly order, but that it is controlled by the Lord of the world, as he brings his plan for history to its fulfilment” (Eichrodt, 419).Once again Ezekiel takes up Lev 26 with its promise that Yahweh is still the God who broke Egypt’s power (Lev 26:13; Häner, 335).

### Biblical Theology Comments

The First Testament story does not read like a story that relates how Yahweh’s will was being implemented all the way along, and how his sovereignty was being exercised. Most of the things that it relates don’t look like the kind of thing that Yahweh would want to happen. Neither does the First Testament say that Yahweh’s will is being implemented. It sometimes speaks of an act by God independent of human involvement, but it more often portrays interactions between divine and human initiatives. The divine initiatives sometimes inspire or make use of human-decision-making. The human initiatives sometimes open up possibilities that Yahweh’s sovereignty can harness, but they sometimes resist Yahweh’s will and need to be opposed by Yahweh in his sovereignty.

A Babylonian record relates how “[in] the 37th year, Nebuchadnezzar, king of Bab[ylon] mar[ched against] Egypt (*Mi-ṣir*) to deliver a battle. [*Ama*]*sis …*,of Egypt, [called up his a]rm[y … from the town *Puṭu-Ḭaman …* distant regions….” *ANET*, 308b). The year is 586. But the campaign ”seems to have achieved acceptance of Nebuchadnezzar’s control of Syria-Palestine rather than his mastery of Egypt itself” (Allen, 2:116). In other words, once more Yahweh’s undertakings find a degree of fulfillment (as a sympathetic interpreter could see it) such as could leave an embattled prophet able to open his mouth and speak further, but leave open a much bigger task for Yahweh to undertake.

If a prophecy is not fulfilled, there is no presumption that one day it may, could, or must be fulfilled, so that (for instance) Alexander’s conquest of Tyre could count as a fulfillment of Ezekiel’s prophecy. “The genuine prophet knows … that Yahweh remains the master of history and also has power freely to take back apparently unambiguous pronouncements or to let them fade into unimportance” (Zimmerli, 2:120). The way things are described in 29:17–20 with Yahweh working via human agents (servants) and adapting to the way things transpire is not a strange exception to his usual speaking and working. It reflects the regular process of that speaking and working.

### Application and Devotional Implications

Ironically, “Ezekiel has probably suffered posthumously more than any other prophet from the labours of those determined to take some of his later visions with utter literalism and to predict on the basis of them all kinds of scenarios for 'the end times'–some of which have manifestly failed to materialize as their proponents predicted” (Wright, 250). In his lifetime, however, he had to endure his people’s dismissing his message and deriding him as someone who claimed to speak Yahweh’s word but did nothing of the sort, which on the basis of the isolated piece of guidance in Deut 18:22 might have exposed him to the charge of speaking presumptuously. Indeed, Ezekiel has made clear enough that people did issue that kind of accusation, as they did of Jeremiah.

Perhaps he will be able to speak out with confidence now because he knows Yahweh has given him the promise in 29:21 to share with people. A prophet’s confidence is based on the knowledge that Yahweh has spoken in a way consistent with who he is (see Jer 23:9–40), not on the fulfillment of prophecies that might be inspired by a false deity (Deut 13:1–5). While Yahweh speaks elsewhere in terms of opening Ezekiel’s mouth (3:27; 33:22), Ezekiel’s “cheerful certainty” in 29:21 (Zimmerli, 2:121) has a different basis and different implications. With some irony, the phrase “an opening of your mouth” (פִּתְחוׄן פֶּה) is equivalent to an Akkadian phrase used in the ritual that turned a divine image into one that could give a revelation.[[187]](#footnote-188)

Not long after this “twenty-seventh year,” another prophet looked back over his own ministry that received the same treatment and recalled thinking that he had toiled in vain (Isa 49:4), but then went on to recall how God encouraged him, as God does Ezekiel here. So God does his servants.

### Selected Bibliography

Garstad, Benjamin. “Nebuchadnezzar's Siege of Tyre in Jerome's *Commentary on Ezekiel*.” *Vigiliae Christianae* 70 (2016): 175–92.

Kennedy, James M. “Hebrew *pithôn* *peh* in the Book of Ezekiel.” *VT* 41 (1991): 233–35.

## Towards the Eve of the Fall, When the Egyptians Pull Out (30:20–26)

### Outline

This brief passage begins with the usual introduction to a message, including a date, and incorporates two regular statements of aim (“and they will acknowledge …”). Following it, the form of words and date that indicate the beginning of another message then feature again in 31:1, which establishes that 30:20–26 is complete on its own. Yahweh here gives yet further precision to the messages in 29:1–30:19. His message is “extremely focused” (Greenberg, 2:633) in the way that, within its brief compass, it multiplies references to arms, breaking, strength, grasping, sword, and hand. Its greater significance lies in its date (see the verse-by-verse commentary). The Egypt messages are working their way towards the fall of Jerusalem. The section unfolds:

Introduction (30:20–21aα)

Yahweh’s declaration of intent regarding Pharaoh (30:21aβb)

Further introduction (“therefore”) and self-announcement (“Here am I”) (30:22aα)

Further exposition of Yahweh’s declaration of intent (30:22aβ–25a)

The purpose (“and they will acknowledge”) (30:25bα)

Further exposition of Yahweh’s declaration of intent (30:25bβ–26a)

The purpose (“and they will acknowledge”) (30:26b)

### Translation

20Now[[188]](#footnote-189) in the eleventh year, in the first [month], on the seventh of the month, Yahweh’s message came to me: 21My man, in that I have broken the arm of Pharaoh, king of Egypt, and there, it has not been bound up so as to heal, by putting on a truss to bind it up, for it to become strong so as to grasp a sword:[[189]](#footnote-190) 22Therefore, the Lord Yahweh has said this.

Here am I, towards Pharaoh king of Egypt:

I will break his arms,

The strong one and the broken one,

and make the sword fall from his hand.

23I will scatter Egypt among the nations,

and disperse them among the countries.

24I will strengthen the arms of the king of Babylon,

and put my sword in his hand.

I will break the arms of Pharoah,

and he will emit the groans of one slain in front of him.[[190]](#footnote-191)

25I will strengthen the arms of the king of Babylon,

but the arms of Pharaoh, they will fall.

And they will acknowledge that I am Yahweh.

When I put my sword into the hand of the king of Babylon,

and he extends it towards the country of Egypt,

26I will scatter Egypt among the nations,

and disperse them among the countries.

And they will acknowledge that I am Yahweh.

### Textual Notes

MT has markers\* after 30:21 and 28.

**30:22** For הַנִּשְׁבָּרֶת “the broken one,” LXX has “the outstretched one,” which removes the inconsistency of Yahweh breaking an arm that was already broken.

**30:24** LXX has an alternative version of 30:24b: “And he will lay it on Egypt, take its plunder, and seize its spoils,” taking up phrases from 29:8, 19 (Allen, 2:118).

### Verse-by-Verse Commentary

**30:20** The date of the message is significant. It falls three months after the threat in 29:1–16 and three months before the fall of Jerusalem, to judge from the date in Jer 52:3. Earlier, Jer 37:3–11 relates how Pharaoh Hophra (Apries) and his army came to support Judah during the siege and caused Nebuchadrezzar to suspend it. That would have brought great relief in Jerusalem and would have suggested the vindication of the messages of prophets with convictions like Hananiah’s (see Jer 28) who promised that Yahweh would look after his people in Jerusalem. It would also have encouraged Judahites in Babylonia who were hoping to return to Jerusalem, and vindicated prophets there who brought the same message (see Jer 29). Like other Egypt messages, but especially 29:17–21, this revelation addresses Ezekiel alone. It confirms the usual drift of his messages, which he thus need not doubt. But he presumably shares it with the Kebarites, who may thus overhear it as a message addressed to him but indirectly challenging them about their expectations. But after 587 it gains further significance, and it does so again through its incorporation in the scroll for anyone paying attention to Ezekiel.

**30:21** The relief of Jerusalem was evidently short, and Nebuchadrezzar was soon back again resuming his siege. This time he maintained it until the city fell, in keeping with Jeremiah’s warning (Jer 34). We do not know what caused Pharaoh to withdraw. Ezekiel speaks metaphorically of Yahweh having broken Pharaoh’s arm, which might suggest a battle between the Babylonian and Egyptian armies, a rematch of the battle of Carchemish in 604 (Jer 46). Ezekiel might even be directly referring to that defeat seven years previously, and to Pharaoh’s later discrete confinement of himself to his own territory (2 Kgs 24:7; cf. Rashi, in MG). In theory, “a broken arm is only a temporary disability,” but this one has not been treated in a way that can facilitate healing (Bowen, 190). Pharaoh’s army is like an individual who has not been given the needed medical treatment. His arm has not found healing and it is not going to (cf. Jer 46:11): that is, Pharaoh’s army is not going to becomes strong enough to defeat Nebuchadrezzar.

**30:22–25aα** Yahweh’s “therefore” spells out the implications of 30:21. He has seen to Pharaoh’s defeat once, and he will do it again. Ezekiel’s wording about arms and then about the strong one and the broken one is a little enigmatic, but it presumably refers to Yahweh’s having brought about one defeat and intending to bring about another. “Logic gives way to rhetoric: I will now see to it that he has two broken arms, the already broken one and the hitherto ‘sound one’” (Greenberg, 2:632). The awkwardness of expression may also reflect Ezekiel’s awareness that “possessor of a strong arm” was a traditional title for a Pharaoh such as Hophra.[[191]](#footnote-192) In light of that, he is making a snide point that some readers might snigger at. The context indicates that, as usual, the point is not that Egypt is wicked, any more than that Babylon is righteous. It is that Yahweh has intentions that will find fulfilment through Nebuchadrezzar’s victory and Hophra’s defeat. Nebuchadrezzar will therefore wield “my sword” (30:24). Yahweh continues by repeating the threat to scatter the Egyptians (cf. 29:12) as he scatters the Judahites, which suggests that as usual he should not be taken too literally. He regularly speaks both metaphorically and hyperbolically.\* What he threatens (or promises) is not a guide to what he will literally do.

**30:25aβ–26** Yahweh restates the undertaking, incorporating a further telling reference to a sword. Set over against Pharaoh’s sword, which he can no longer wield (30:21, 22), is Yahweh’s sword that he will put into the hand of Nebuchadrezzar (30:24) and Nebuchadrezzar will extend towards Egypt (30:25). Along with that aspect of the restatement is Yahweh’s restated intention that people will acknowledge him as a result of his action. Yahweh’s formulating the restatement without saying anything much that is new suggests the challenge of the situation whereby somehow he has to get through to the Kebarites. The combined reference to his initiative and to Nebuchadrezzar’s action that unwittingly follows from it is a particularly telling succinct version of the way these two self-determinations work together. In substance it parallels Yahweh’s talk about the sword in 21:1–32 [6–37]. Nebuchadrezzar is Yahweh’s mask in the sense of being the person (the *persona*, the character)in the drama who represents Yahweh (Jenson, 239).

### Biblical Theology Comments

The provision of a date in combination with the reference to this being “Yahweh’s message” (30:20) indicates that the Prophets “were not simply writing history but prophecies delivered at certain times” (Theodoret, 204), though they were also not delivering timeless prophecies but messages delivered at certain times. Within the Scriptures, it is the Prophets who mostly give the dates of their messages. Among the Prophets, it is Ezekiel who does so most systematically. Within Ezekiel, it is the Egypt messages that do so most systematically. And among the Egypt messages, this one stands out for showing how the date of a biblical passage sometimes matters. The Scriptures do not usually tell us their dates, which suggests that they do not often matter, which is just as well, because usually we don’t know the dates, and two centuries of concentrated scholarly effort to discover them has not produced many clear results. While the Scriptures are not timeless, they are time-transcendent, and an example such as this passage shows that they are also timely. Where they tell us their date, it is worth paying attention.

### Application and Devotional Implications

This shortest of the Egypt messages, in 30:20–26 (if we regard 29:17–21 as part of 29:17–30:19) might seem one that hardly needed for inclusion among the Egypt messages or in the Ezekiel scroll or in the Scriptures, but its presence draws attention to one of the handful of important principles of spirituality for the people of God. Here, once more, Ezekiel implies the importance of trusting in Yahweh rather than trusting in human help. He implicitly underscores how trusting in Yahweh and living on the basis of trust in Yahweh rather than in human resources is so hard for the people of God. Zimmerli further comments (2:139–40):

World history appears to the observer again and again as the work of strong arms. And those who cannot reflect on it from the outside as dispassionate observers, but endure it personally in affliction, look fervently for the strong hand which can deliver them and will approach it and reach out to it so that it might help them. Thus Jerusalem, and the exiles who were linked to her, looked to the strong hand of Egypt so that that hand, which once held Palestine firmly in its grip, might become her helper against the oppressors. The prophet proclaims that, over and above the strong human arms in world history, another is at work, who in his freedom breaks the strong arm on the one side and on the other knows how to make the arm of a foreigner really strong, who on the one side knocks the sword out of one person's hand and on the other hands out his sword to someone else, so that he might thereby complete his work and his judgment. In all this activity, man should be aware that he is not in the grip of the imponderable course of history, not even in the grip of the all-powerful historical forces of men, however great they might be, but should let himself be brought to the point of recognizing and honoring the only lord, who makes himself known in the mystery of his being through the judgment of history, and of obeying his word which is proclaimed through the mouth of his prophet. This removes man from the role of a mere spectator, but removes him also from all despair of succumbing to the terror of sheer, uncomprehended power. God, who has called in his own name his people to himself and in this has made it possible for them to name him, stands above all power.

### Selected Bibliography

Lee, Lydia. *Mapping Judah’s Fate in Ezekiel’s Oracles against the Nations*. ANEM 15. Atlanta: SBL, 2016.

## A Comparison for Egypt (31:1–18)

### Outline

Ezek 31 again concerns the destiny of Pharaoh and his people, and its central declaration is the same, that disaster is to overwhelm Egypt. It does not suggest a background in a reversal experienced by Pharaoh, as 30:20–26 does. It does have a more general background in some facts about Egypt and about Judah’s attitude to Egypt. A key recurring consideration in Ezekiel, presupposed in 30:20–26, is Judah’s seeing Egypt as friend, supporter, and ally, as key to becoming or staying independent of Babylonia. But Ezekiel sees Egypt as characterized by “faithlessness” (31:11), which at least includes its service of lumps and idols (30:13). That might be understandable for Egypt itself, but these are the kind of deities that Judah is also inclined to serve, and Egypt is likely therefore to lead Judah into even deeper trouble with Yahweh. Further, what’s in this relationship for Egypt? Egypt will be glad to extend its empire, or at least its sphere of influence (hinted at by the list of peoples in 30:1–19). It wants to see itself as comparable with a great power such as Assyria, to be and to be seen as lofty and impressive like a giant cedar or pine tree. It is ambitious and self-important. So Judah is simply exchanging one imperial overlord for another (the one from which Yahweh had delivered Israel centuries previously!). But Egypt is actually doomed, and therefore no use as a friend or ally to rely on for protection from Nebuchadrezzar.

In explicitly or implicitly raising these questions, Ezek 31 stands back. It moves between past and future, its past being the past of Assyria that has implications for the future of Egypt. It again gives a key place to a “therefore,” one that differs from the recurrent Ezekiel “therefore” between critique and threat. This “therefore” marks a move between describing a flourishing to describing of a downfall, in formal similarity to a requiem or death lament, though it is no more a lament than a threat (Eichrodt, 424). It is much longer than most of Ezekiel’s verse messages, and more poetic in the sense that it works with a key image, of a king or a country as a flourishing tree providing home and protection to birds and animals. As happens in an allegory or parable,\* it can move between expounding the image, of tree, birds, and animals, and incorporating reference to what the image refers to, the nations (see especially 31:6). The picture’s composition “resembles heraldic design rather than straightforward description of one item.”[[192]](#footnote-193)

The image has a substantial Middle Eastern and world background,[[193]](#footnote-194) and also a significant scriptural background and foreground in passages such as Gen 2, Isa 10–11, and Dan 4. The message resumes the use of the image earlier in Ezek 17 and 19. It also takes up aspects of earlier messages about other nations such as Tyre, including the awareness that height leads to arrogance, and the picture of going down to Pit as a consequence. A tree, then, is an image for Assyria, whose downfall as the great Middle Eastern power happened within the lifetime and memory of Ezekiel and most of the Kebarites. The “story” in Ezek 31 is a familiar one. The chapter works by inviting Pharaoh, and thus Judah, to think about a comparison between Egypt and Assyria. The idea implies an irony, as Egypt has never been as big a power as Assyria. But the argument implies that Egypt thinks it is comparable (or Judah thinks it is), so Egypt (or Judah) needs to think about what happened to Assyria.

As Ezekiel’s report of receiving a message on a particular date marks the beginning of a chapter, another introduction of the same kind in 32:1 marks the beginning of the next chapter. So 31:1–18 is a complete section within the scroll. It has no statements of aim (“they will acknowledge”). What is the point of the message? It is overtly intended for Pharaoh and his “horde,” his army and people, but addressing the foreign power is a trope, as usual. The immediate recipient of the message is Ezekiel, whom it further reassures of the truth of Yahweh’s speaking to him about Babylonia and Egypt (see 29:17–30:19). He will give the message to the Kebarites who are wondering what is going to happen in Jerusalem. The date places the message two months later than 30:20–26 and thus a month before the city’s fall. At the time Ezekiel and his community would not know this, though they would likely know that the situation was desperate, but Ezekiel compiling the scroll and people reading it would know. The less immediate, subsequent recipients of the message will thus be Judahites thinking about such messages from Ezekiel after 587, and then Judahites reading the Ezekiel scroll after its completion sometime after 570 (see 29:17). They might still be wondering about the destiny of Egypt, still the big neighbor to the southwest for people living in Judah or focused on Judah, not least in the later context of the Hellenistic period. Egypt remains the eminence grise of Israel’s story. So reading Ezekiel’s messages parallels reading the Gospels, which readers may do with two levels of consciousness. They may read them “with” Jesus’ disciples, who haven’t yet lived through Jesus being crucified and then rising to new life, but also read them as people who know about these events.

The chapter unfolds:

Introduction, with a question for Pharaoh (31:1–2)

How Assyria grew great (31:3–9)

Renewed introduction (“therefore”) (31:10aα)

How Yahweh brought about Assyria’s downfall through Babylon (31:10aβ–14)

Renewed introduction (31:15aα)

How Yahweh further brought about Assyria’s downfall (31:15aβ–17)

Renewed question and inference for Pharaoh and his people (31:18)

### Translation

1Now[[194]](#footnote-195) in the eleventh year, in the third [month], on the first of the month, Yahweh’s message came to me: 2My man, say to Pharaoh king of Egypt and to his horde, With whom do you compare[[195]](#footnote-196) in your magnitude?

3There, Assyria, a cedar in Lebanon,

handsome in greenery,

A shade-giving wood, height lofty,

with its crown being among the boughs,

4Water making it grow,

the deep making it tall,

Causing its[[196]](#footnote-197) rivers to go[[197]](#footnote-198)

around its planting,

And sending its channels

towards all the trees of the open country.

5As a consequence its height was lofty,

more than all the trees of the open country.

Its limbs became abundant and its branches grew long

because of the abundant water sent off to it.[[198]](#footnote-199)

6In its limbs there nested

all the birds of the heavens.

Under its branches there gave birth

all the creatures of the open country.

In its shade there would live

all the many nations.

7It was handsome in its magnitude, in the length of its boughs,

because its root came towards much water,

8Cedars not rivaling it in God’s garden,

pines not overshadowing its limbs.

And plane trees not like it in its impressiveness,

no tree in God’s garden comparing with it.

As in its handsomeness 9I made it handsome,

in the abundance of its boughs,

All the trees in Eden were jealous of it,

the ones in God’s garden.

10Therefore the Lord Yahweh said this.[[199]](#footnote-200)

Since you were lofty in height,

and it put its crown among the boughs,

With its mind high in its loftiness,

11then I would put it[[200]](#footnote-201) into the hand of the chief of the nations.

He would definitely take action[[201]](#footnote-202) towards it,

as in accordance with its faithlessness I threw it out.

12So foreigners cut it off, the most terrifying of the nations,

and abandoned it to the mountains.

In all the valleys its boughs fell,

and its branches broke in all the ravines in the earth.

From its shade went down

all the peoples of the earth, and abandoned it.

13On it in its fallen state all the birds of the heavens would dwell,

and to its limbs came all the animals of the open country.

14In order that:

no trees with water should be lofty in their height,

or put their crown among the boughs,

Nor should any that drink water

stand as their top people in their loftiness.

Because all of them are being given over to death,

to the country far below,

Among human beings,

towards the people going down to Pit.

15The Lord Yahweh has said this.

On the day of its going down to Sheol,

I made [the deep] mourn, I covered the deep, because of it.

I held back its streams

and the great waters were checked.

I made Lebanon gloomy for it,

and all the trees in the open country [in] a faint because of it.

16At the sound of its fall

I made nations shake,

When I made it go down to Sheol

with the people going down to Pit.

All the trees in Eden found consolation in the country far below,

the choicest and best in Lebanon, all that drink water,

17As also those people went down to Sheol with it,

to the people slain by the sword,

And its entire force[[202]](#footnote-203) living in its shadow

among the nations.

18To whom do you compare, as like you,

in magnificence and in magnitude among the trees in Eden?

You will be brought down with the trees in Eden

to the country far below.

Among the foreskinned you will lie down,

with the people slain by the sword.

That is Pharaoh and all his horde (an affirmation of the Lord Yahweh).

### Textual Notes

MT has markers\* after 31:9, 15, and 18.

**31:3** SomeEVVtake אַשּׁוּר “Assyria” to refer to the box tree, otherwise known as תְּאַשּׁוּר, or actually read תְּאַשּׁוּר (Ewald, 158). The chapter then becomes directly rather than indirectly a portrait of Egypt, which makes a difference to the way it communicates, though not to its message. But there are no other instances of אַשּׁוּר meaning “box tree” and no manuscripts or ancient versions that read תְּאַשּׁוּר.

LXX lacks “a shade-giving wood.”

For עֲבׄתִים “the boughs,” LXX “the clouds” implies עָבוׄת.

**31:5** LXX has a shorter version of 31:5b.

**31:9** LXX lacks “I made it handsome.”

**31:10** For “you were lofty in height,” Syr. has third person, and for “it put its crown,” LXX has second person, either of which makes for a smoother line.

**31:11** LXX lacks כּרִשְׁעוׄ גֵּרַשְׁתִּהוּ, “as in accordance with its faithlessness I threw it out.”

**31:14** For אֵלֵיהֶם, “[as] their top people,” LXX “towards them” implies אֲלֵיהֶם, the reading in many medieval manuscripts.

**31:15–16** LXX has a number of third-person verbs here where MT has first person, and vice versa.

**31:17** For וּזְרׄעוׄ, “and its arm,” LXX “and his offspring” implies וְזַרְעוׄ.

Then for גּוׄיִם “[among] the nations,” LXX “[in the middle of] their life they perished” implies חַיֵּיהֶם, perhaps plus a verb.

**31:18** LXX lacks “in magnificence and in magnitude among the trees in Eden.”

For *וְהוּרַדְתָּ*, “you will be brought down,” LXX has “descend, and be brought down.”

Q has the regular spelling for *הֲמוֹנוֹ*; K implies *הֲמוֹנֹה* (GK 91e).

### Verse-by-Verse Commentary

**31:1–2** The date is another two months later than that in 30:20, and just a month before the fall of Jerusalem. The implication of what follows is that the Judahites have not been convinced by 30:20–26, and Yahweh is trying again. This time, Ezekiel is notionally to ask Pharaoh and his people a question, which is really one for the Kebarites to think about. How big does Pharaoh think he is? He’s obviously bigger than Judah. Is he bigger than Nebuchadrezzar? Big enough to take on Nebuchadrezzar?

**31:3–5** Yahweh wants Ezekiel rather to compare Egypt with Assyria, which wasn’t as big as Babylonia but was pretty big, and bigger than Egypt. The point will be, what eventually happened to Assyria. It was greater than you, but it fell into my hands, didn’t it? (Qimhi, in MG). It got put down by Babylon, didn’t it? (Jerome, 359). But let’s go back to the beginning of the story. Assyria was like a giant tree such as a cedar—handsome, impressive, leafy, tall, big-branched. It was that way because it was well-watered.

Height is one of the “metaphors we live by,” for Assyrians or Kebarites as it is for modern Westerners.[[203]](#footnote-204) And water is one of the elemental realities for Middle Eastern peoples, and for many others who cannot take it for granted. The tree is also a traditional image for something impressive and protective. These three, height, water, and tree, can come together in connection with kingship (cf. 17:1–24; 19:1–14). If one works with the metaphor of height, it’s easy to see that likening Assyria to a tall tree draws attention to the empire’s impressiveness, in foliage and in loftiness. Associating it with water draws attention to water’s importance if a tree is to be a tree, but Ezekiel heightens the more-than-merely-ordinary flourishing of the tree with his reference to “the deep” (תְּהוׄם; cf. 26:19; Gen 1:2; 7:11; 8:2), which plays an important role in providing the tree with copious water through its rivers and channels (31:4–5). Within the portrait of an imperial tree there is no explicit reference to a king, but we know from 31:2 that the king stands alongside the portrait, and the familiar collocation of king and tree would mean it came easily to people’s mind. The portrait is quite laudatory. It is not immediately obvious where Ezekiel is going with it. There is only a hint of potential critique in the description of its “height” as “lofty”(cf. 28:2, 5, 17).

**31:6–9** Such a tree that reaches high, deep, and wide (Bowen, 193) could provide a great home and shelter for birds and animals. And an imperial “tree” can see itself as providing a home for the peoples within the empire. The literal duly pokes through the metaphor when Yahweh notes that “all the many nations” also lived in the tree’s shade. An imperial power likes to think itself as a protector and not just overlord. It probably is a protector, though also an overlord. Yahweh heightens the picture further when he comments that nothing in God’s garden rivaled this tree in its impressiveness. Three times he refers to God’s garden and once to Eden in this connection. The hyperbole\* is a great compliment, but it might be worrying. It might recall the celebration of someone’s life in a requiem, which is associated with the fact that the celebration takes place in the context of the person having died. Or does the celebration begin to hint that the higher they are, the further they fall?

**31:10–11** Ezekiel’s “therefore” reflects how the form of 31:3–17 also overlaps with that of a message conveying critique and threat. It actually implies a recollection of past critique (insofar as there is critique at all) and threat that has already been implemented. It starts from the fact that it’s hard for someone lofty to avoid becoming lofty in attitude. The critique of Assyria parallels that of Tyre (28:1–5). Yahweh makes critique more explicit when he says that his action towards Assyria matched Assyria’s “faithlessness” (רֶשַׁע). In Ezekiel this and related words occur especially in critiques where they point to Israel’s unfaithfulness in both ethical and religious realms and warn they it will issue in death, while also pointing to the possibility of turning from faithlessness and finding life (see Ezek 3; 18; 33). The same connotations could apply here, but Yahweh’s solemn point is that his “therefore” giving over the “tree” to “the chief of the nations” presupposes the absence of any such turn. The switching between “you” and “it” and the switching of tenses in the passage then reflects the move between the portraits of Assyria in the past and Egypt in the present, which complements the earlier switch between the portrait of a tree and of an empire (31:6). In the expressions “I would give it” and “he would definitely act,” the *yiqtol\** verbs interwoven with the *qatals* can be understood to refer to what Yahweh did when he brought Assyria down. But *yiqtol* verbs would usually be assumed to refer to the future—“I will give it” and “he will definitely act.” Here, they add to the reminder to people listening that Yahweh is not just talking about something that happened to Assyria some decades ago. Strictly, Nabopolassar was “the chief of the nations,” the leader of the Babylonians, when Assyria fell, though Nebuchadrezzar was involved in its downfall and is certainly the chief of the nations now. Yahweh’s recalling that “I threw it out” (גָּרַשׁ piel) makes for another link. This verb mostly refers to Yahweh’s expelling other nations from Canaan, but once to Yahweh expelling Adam from Eden garden and the life tree (Gen 3:24) and three times to Pharaoh expelling the Israelites from Egypt (Exod 6:1; 11:1; 12:39).

**31:12–13** The Babylonians, then, are the “foreigners” and “the most terrifying of the nations,” with whom Yahweh threatened Tyre in 28:7 and already Egypt in 30:10–12). “Like reckless lumberjacks, the Babylonians felled cedar Assyria and left it” to the mountains, valleys, and ravines where and through which it had flourished (Darr, on 31:10–14). Again interweaving the image and the reality it portrays, “all the peoples of the earth” say goodbye to Assyria, which can no longer provide it with protection, though figurative birds and animals can continue to make homes on bits of the tree in its fallen state. “Went down” (יָרַד) may simply mean “withdrew” (Greenberg, 2:641), but this occurrence of the verb anticipates the one in 31:14.

**31:14** These “in order that” clauses are loosely appended to what precedes, and they also prepare the way for 31:15–17. First, they articulate the object of Yahweh’s action. The statement in 31:14a does not relate to 31:12–13 alone, and the “in order that” does not follow from 31:13. The statement relates to 31:10–13, indeed to 31:3–13 as a whole, from which nearly every word is taken up. The statement of aim implies an irony, since Assyria’s downfall has not held back the aspiration of Babylon or Egypt or any other would-be empire, any other of “their top people” (אֵלַיהֶם; cf. 17:13). But the statement does wistfully invite wise readers to think about its point. In theory, the point gains further force from what follows in 31:14b, where again literal reality becomes prominent. The trees that drink thirstily in order to grow to a great height, but are then are cut down, are human beings who go down from the protection they no longer enjoy, and are on their way down to “death, to the country far below, … to Pit” (see 26:20). Yahweh thus adds another level to his allegory. It’s about a tree, and about its being cut down. It’s about a chief and his empire, and its downfall. And it’s about human beings, and their descent to Sheol. Each of these helps to explain and bring home the nature of the others.

**31:15** There begins another, final account of Assyria’s downfall, in which all three levels of the allegory feature. When Assyria fell, the tree went down to Sheol: Yahweh gives an expanded description of the fate of both tree and people that restates 31:10–13 and also more systematically portrays a reversal of 31:3–9. Instead of the deep’s streams flowing, Yahweh had held them back. He then lays another image over that one: he had thereby “made [the deep] mourn” and “covered the deep.” There might be two meanings to that covering: he had covered it in mourning like a covering in sack, and covered it so that its water resources no longer flowed (see Rashi and Qimhi, in MG, and Rosenberg, 269–70).

**31:16–17** The continuing description recalls Isa 14:9–10, the satire over the fall of Babylon (Greenberg, 2:645–46), satire typical in accounts of descent to Sheol (Darr, on 31:15–18). Block (195–96) comments that the cedar

has arrived in Sheol, where it joins many other magnificent trees, including those from Eden and the finest specimens of the Lebanon, who have preceded it. These now find relief, knowing that no matter how high and mighty a tree may have been during its earthly existence, in death all are equal. The glorious cedar may have evoked jealousy in its earthly life (v. 9), but in Sheol it has nothing to be envied; all are on the same level.

The tree that reached high as the clouds, falls low as Sheol (31:3, 15). The tree that grew vigorously, is faint in Sheol (31:4-7, 15). The tree that gives life to creatures, is dead with no life to give (31:6, 13). The deep that flowed with nourishment, is stopped up (31:4, 15). The tree that had impressed all, is mocked by all (31:8, 16). The height that was magnificent, has become deluded pomposity (31:3, 10). The tree with which Pharaoh might have been compared in his great power is brought down to the underworld (31:2, 18).[[204]](#footnote-205)

**31:18** Ezekiel goes back to the question with which he started. You fancy yourself as someone impressive who leads an impressive people like Assyria? Think about what happened to Assyria. If that’s your analogy, it suggests that you will fall like Assyria. You will be felled like other trees. You will go to be like people in the country far below. Indeed, you will not just have an experience of downfall analogous to everyone else’s death. It will be like a death that puts you in the company of people who have not been circumcised (28:10) or who had been killed in battle, not properly buried, and not really at rest. The implication is that such people do make it to Sheol, but they cannot share the same section of the dorm with other people (see further the Biblical Theology comments on 32:17–32).

### Biblical Theology Comments

In any context, the message applies to Egypt a fact of recurring significance in the Prophets, that great powers get put down. They don’t have to be wicked in particular ways—by being oppressive, self-indulgent, or idolatrous. Their power turns them into something worrisomely godlike, and they therefore cannot be left as they are. If the message reached Pharaoh and his people, then, it would be a little like Britain in the 1950s or 1960s coming to face the fact that it could no longer hold onto an empire. To the Kebarites, it would be another reminder that they would be unwise to think that Egypt can save Judah. To readers of the Ezekiel scroll, it would be an affirmation that God would in due course put down the power of the day.

“Thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory” is not part of the Lord’s Prayer as Jesus formulated it, but it’s hard to imagine him disagreeing with it. It fits particularly well with the theology of the book of Daniel, which includes Nebuchadrezzar’s vision of a tree that compares with Ezek 31. In theory it ought to be possible for an empire and an emperor to hold great power and use it in a way that benefits people and does not lead to the empire and emperor becoming “lofty in mind.” In practice it doesn’t seem to be possible. Perhaps it is actually impossible in principle as well as in practice to hold great power without that very position compromising the fact that “thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory.” Might there be such a possibility if one said each day, “Hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is heaven,” as well as, “thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory”?

### Application and Devotional Implications

“Nations, despite all the evidence, generally suppose themselves immortal” (Jenson, 242). Reinhold Niebuhr said in a sermon on Ezek 31:

No man or nation is wise or good enough to hold the power which the great nations in the victorious alliance [in the Second World War] hold without being tempted to both pride and injustice. Pride is the religious dimension of the sin which flows from absolute power; and injustice is its social dimension. The great nations speak so glibly of their passion for justice and peace; and so obviously betray interests which contradict justice and peace. This is precisely the kind of spiritual pride which the prophets had in mind when they pronounced divine judgment upon the nations which said, “I am god, I sit in the seat of God.” Consider how blandly the victorious nations draw plans for destroying the economic and political life of defeated nations in the hope of rebuilding them as democracies “from the ground up.” This lack of consideration for the organic aspects of the social existence of other nations, this confidence in our ability to create something better by our fiat, is a perfect illustration of the pride of power. It is not made any more sufferable by the idea that we are doing all this for the sake of “purging” the defeated nations of their evil and bestowing our “democracy” upon them. The very absurdity of restoring democracy by the will of the conqueror contains the pretension against which the prophets inveighed.[[205]](#footnote-206)

### Selected Bibliography

Boadt, Lawrence. *Ezekiel’s Oracles against Egypt: A Literary and Philological Study of Ezekiel 29–32.* Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1980.

Geyer, John B. *Mythology and Lament: Studies in the Oracles about the Nations*. Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2004.

Niebuhr, Reinhold. “The Nemesis of Nations: Ezekiel 31:1–14.” In Niebuhr, *Discerning the Signs of the Times*, 59–72. New York: Scribner’s, 1946.

## Yahweh’s Requiem Threat for Pharaoh (32:1–16)

### Outline

The date in 32:1 indicates that Jerusalem has fallen, and one can imagine that people might assume that Nebuchadrezzar would now move on to attack Egypt (Sweeney, 157). In this context, Yahweh again confronts Pharaoh and declares the intent to take action against him and his people. Another date and message report in 32:17 signify the beginning of the next section.

The message begins with a confrontation implying reason for taking action (32:2), and the declaration about the action then follows (32:3–15). The nature of the message, and the balance between a brief, two-line critique and the bulk of the section warning about the action, compare with other messages. An initial semi-distinctive feature is that Yahweh calls this message a “requiem” (קִינָה, 32:2, repeated in 32:16). This term recurs from earlier chapters (2:10; 19:1, 14; 26:17; 27:2, 32; 28:12), but there it implied a review of someone’s life and a mourning over the disaster or death that had overtaken them, though it was a figure of speech insofar as it referred to a death or disaster that had not yet happened. It sought to draw people into imagining that it had happened, and thus to face the fact that it was going to, or to take action that might avert it. This final requiem takes the fiction further. It says virtually nothing by way of review of the past, only the first colon about Pharaoh thinking of himself as “lion of the nations.” And after 32:2bβ, it lacks the requiem rhythm with its inclination to two-stress second cola and overtly speaks about the future not the past. It is a warning that follows up the critique.

Although Yahweh tells Ezekiel that the message is about Pharaoh, as usual there is no suggestion that Ezekiel should somehow get the message to Pharaoh. If it is meant for recipients other than Ezekiel himself, it is for the Kebarites, though in due course it will reach other Judahites. Ezekiel says nothing directly about its significance for him or for them. But the opening critique in 3:2 and the declaration in 3:11–12 suggest its logic .

* Babylon and Nebuchadrezzar are Yahweh’s agents in implementing his purpose in the Levant in the 590s and 580s
* Pharaoh is in the wrong in seeking to act as a “lion of the nations” by opposing this purpose
* Pharaoh and Egypt will therefore pay the price described in this and the other Egypt messages
* The Kebarites and the rest of Judah need to live in light of those facts, which is not what they were doing as they looked to Egypt for support against Babylonia.

The section unfolds:

Introduction (32:1–2aα)

Yahweh’s critique of Pharaoh (32:2aβb)

* He saw himself as a lion among the nations
* He was a monster who muddied the water

Renewed introduction (32:3aα)

Yahweh’s declaration of intent regarding Pharaoh (32:3aβ–10)

* He will bring a horde of peoples against him
* He will capture the monster and feed him to the animals and birds
* He will impose darkness instead of light upon him
* He will appall the nations over Pharaoh’s fate

Renewed introduction (32:11)

Yahweh’s declaration of intent regarding Egypt (32:12–15)

* He will cause the horde to fall
* He will eliminate the cattle and thus restore the rivers
* He will make the country an empty waste

Afterword (32:16)

### Translation

1Now[[206]](#footnote-207) in the twelfth year, in the twelfth month, on the first of the month, Yahweh’s message came to me: 2My man, raise a requiem over Pharaoh king of Egypt. Say to him,

With a cougar[[207]](#footnote-208) among the nations you compared yourself,[[208]](#footnote-209)

but you were like the big monster in the seas.

You thrashed about [in] your streams,

stirred up water with your feet,

and muddied its[[209]](#footnote-210) streams.

3The Lord Yahweh has said this.

So I will spread my net over you

with an assembly of many peoples,

and they will lift you up in my mesh.

4I will throw you onto the ground—

on the face of the open country I will fling you.

I will let all the birds of the heavens settle on you,

and let the creatures of all the earth fill themselves from you.

5I will put your flesh on the mountains,

and fill the valleys with your rot.[[210]](#footnote-211)

6I will drench the earth with your flow (from your blood) to the mountains,[[211]](#footnote-212)

and ravines will be full from you.

7I will cover the heavens in extinguishing you,

and darken their stars.

The sun, I will cover it with cloud,

and the moon, it will not give its light.

8All the light-givers in the heavens

I will darken over you,

and put gloom over your country (an affirmation of the Lord Yahweh).

9I will vex the mind of many peoples,

when I cause [you in] your brokenness to come among the nations,

Into countries that you have not known,

10and I make many peoples desolate over you.

Their kings, their hair will stand on end over you,

when I wave my sword in front of them.

They will tremble moment after moment,[[212]](#footnote-213)

each for their life, on the day of your downfall.

11Because the Lord Yahweh has said this.

In that the sword of the king of Babylon will come [to] you:

12By the swords of titans I will cause your horde to fall,

the most terrifying of the nations, all of them.

They will destroy the pride of Egypt,

and all its horde will perish.

13I will make all its cattle vanish

from beside abundant water.

Human feet will not muddy it anymore,

and cattle hooves, it will not muddy it.[[213]](#footnote-214)

14At that time I will let their water be clear,

and their rivers I will let flow like oil (an affirmation of the Lord Yahweh).

15When I make the country of Egypt a waste,

and the country desolated of what fills it,

When I strike down all the people who live in it,

and they will acknowledge that I am Yahweh.

16That is a requiem, and people will chant it. The women of the nations, they will chant it. Over Egypt and over its entire horde they will chant it (an affirmation of the Lord Yahweh).

### Textual Notes

MT has markers\* after 32:3, 10, and 16.

**32:1** For “twelfth year,” LXX has “eleventh year,” dating the message before the fall of Jerusalem (see 33:21).

**32:3** For וְהֶעֱלוּךָ, “and they will lift you up,” LXX, Vg. “and I will bring you up” implies וְהֶעֱלִיתִיךָ. There is some ongoing switching between third person and first person in 32:1–16, with variation between MT and LXX.

**32:4** For אֲטִילֶךְ, “I will throw you,” LXX “[they] will be filled with you” implies יִמָּלְאוּךָ (Block, 2:203).

**32:5** For רָמוּתֶךָ “your rot” (see translation footnote), LXX “your blood” implies a form such as דָּמֶךָ.

**32:9** For שִׁבְרְךָ “your shattering, LXX “your captivity” implies שִׁבְיְךָ.

**32:10** In the last colon, LXX “accepting their fall from the day of your fall” is apparently a free translation of MT.

### Verse-by-Verse Commentary

**32:1** The date is now a few weeks after news of Jerusalem’s fall has arrived (33:21). This event finally terminates any possibility that Egypt might enable Jerusalem to withstand the Babylonians. It might also raise the question of what happens to Egypt now, and what should be Judah’s attitude to Egypt now, and whether Judahites might have a future there (cf. Clements, 141). Jer 41–44 relates how some Jerusalemites took refuge there.

**32:2** Anyway, Yahweh takes an initiative in telling Ezekiel to “raise a requiem over Pharaoh, king of Egypt,” as if he is not merely doomed but has already died. In a requiem, one expects some recollection of the person’s significance, and momentarily it might seem we getting one here, if the requiem is acknowledging Pharaoh as someone who was “a cougar among the nations.” He was, then, not merely a cougar by Judahite standards (19:2–9) but someone who walked proud in a pride of lions. So he thought. But the verb that follows, “you compared yourself” (נִדְמִיתָ) to such a lion, subverts the idea that Ezekiel the requiem-writer is celebrating Pharaoh. This verb usually means “you destroyed yourself,” and momentarily Ezekiel’s listeners might think that he is acknowledging a tragedy, the tragic fall of the great cougar. There may indeed be an undertone of that meaning. But the subsequent cola will suggest that “a cougar among the nations” was simply the way he mistakenly saw himself.[[214]](#footnote-215) He was actually no such thing.

The slighting of Pharaoh continues in the description of him as “like the big monster in the seas.” Ezekiel has already made a comparison of that kind with one snide implication (see 29:3) and now he indulges in two more. Pharaoh has behaved as if he were the embodiment of monumental, threatening metaphysical power, “the monster, in the sea” of Isa 27:1, not merely a political and military figure. He and his army have not merely caused trouble, disturbance, and destruction in foreign lands (Qimhi, in MG). “He has not simply opposed Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, he has challenged the sovereignty of Yahweh, the God of the heavens and the earth” (Odell, 404). And really, he is neither impressive cougar nor big monster. Ezekiel’s critique is not that Pharaoh has done nothing, but that his activity has been worse than useless. Recent Middle Eastern history would have been more straightforward, fewer Judahites might have died, less damage might have been caused to Jerusalem, if Pharaoh had kept out of it. The requiem’s review of the victim’s life has turned into an indictment. He has not merely muddied the waters in the literal fashion of a thrashing crocodile, or in the metaphorical fashion of a national leader making international affairs more complicated, but has acted in the metaphysical fashion of a power opposing Yahweh’s purpose at work in the world, which at this point required the severe chastisement of Judah. Yahweh does not merely shrug his shoulders at such active opposition to his purpose, but takes punitive action.

**32:3–6** An indictment naturally leads into a declaration of intent to take action against the monster that has muddied the water. In a passage such as 28:11–19, Yahweh maintained the image of a requiem, picturing the punitive action as if it were already past. Here in 32:2 he has mingled the image of a requiem with the framework of indictment and warning, and he continues with that other framework in speaking explicitly of the future rather than the notional past. Ezekiel makes brief mention of the literal means by which Yahweh will act, in making use of “an assembly of many peoples.” The threat corresponds to the challenge about Pharaoh’s assumption concerning his political and military prowess, and to the warning given to Judah (e.g., 23:24). Pharaoh’s “assembly” had been no use to Zedekiah (17:17) and it will be no use to itself. On the other hand, Nebuchadrezzar’s assembly will deal with Pharaoh, perhaps in the very near future as Nebuchadrezzar moves on from Judah.

Metaphorically, too, Yahweh picks up imagery he has used before. Pharaoh the self-styled metaphysical monster is also the great crocodile, and by means of that assembly of peoples Yahweh will capture the crocodile, dump it on dry ground, and let birds, animals and earth itself feed off it. “For an Egyptian king, who usually spent his entire reign building his burial chamber, nothing would be more humiliating” (Bowen, 197). Much of the gory detail here corresponds to Assyrian imagery (Greenberg, 2:656), but Ezekiel is also once again picking up imagery he has used before (see 31:12–13). Here even more than there, the warning is markedly metaphorical and hyperbolic:\* Egypt does not have mountains and valleys. As the Titanic Tyre will be sunk, however, the mighty dragon Egypt will be slain (Allen, 2:132). Admittedly, one does not capture a crocodile in a net (Jenson, 246), but the Kebarites might know the story in Enuma Elish Tablet IV of Marduk enfolding Tiamat in his net and tearing her apart (*ANET*, 67).[[215]](#footnote-216)

**32:7–8** Yahweh moves to another image: “extinguishing” Pharaoh (כָּבָה piel), putting his light out, shrouding the heavens, stopping any light from the sky falling on him. That will mean darkness falling on his country, Yahweh adds, in a third colon in the verse that makes this devastating further point. It is another example of the fate of king and people being interwoven, for good and for ill. With regard to Israel, Yahweh’s day was to be darkness not light, and for Pharaoh, it will be the same. It will be like the lights going out (cf. 30:3, 18). Ezekiel’s imagery will later become characteristic of visions describing the end of history and the end of the world. Here his picture corresponds to the prospect that Amos 5:18–20 lays before Israel. There is to be darkness over Pharaoh and gloom over “your country.” For Judahites, that phrase could recall Yahweh’s original declaration that there would be “gloom over the country of Egypt” (Exod 10:21).

**32:9–10** Yahweh’s intention for Pharaoh has one further aspect. Other nations will be horrified and terrified by what happens to Pharaoh. It is yet another way of conveying to Pharaoh (and thus to the Kebarites) how devastating Yahweh’s action will be. “Brokenness” (שֶׁבֶר) is a further expression suggesting how Yahweh’s action against Pharaoh has a devastating effect on Pharaoh’s people (e.g., Jer 14:17; Lam 2:11). Yahweh has put his sword into Nebuchadrezzar’s hand (21:1–32 [6–37]; 30:4), and Nebuchadrezzar has been waving it and (more literally) thus urging on his army. In the other nations’ mind’s eye or through the arrival of the news or of the shattered remains of the people, Yahweh is also waving his sword in front of the other nations. The sword could also be coming their way. Ezekiel’s description of the effect on them of the arrival in their midst of the people’s broken remains, or simply the arrival of the news about that brokenness in Egypt, again parallels his description regarding (Tyre 26:15–18; 27:28–36; 28:19). And his declarations concerning Pharaoh’s people again overlap with his declarations concerning Judah elsewhere, as Pharaoh is taken to a land that he has not known (e.g., Jer 15:14; 16:13). The threat closes with a concrete reference to “the day” that is coming for Pharaoh.

**32:11** In the resumptive introduction, Ezekiel picks up the references to Babylon and its king, especially in 29:17–30:26, and to Yahweh’s sword in the king’s hand, especially in 29:8; 30:4–6, 23–26. As the derisive description of Pharaoh at the beginning of 32:2–10 resumed 29:3–6, here the summary description of Nebuchadrezzar’s coming at the beginning of 32:11–32:15 resumes 29:8.

**32:12–14** The process continues whereby Yahweh restates earlier declarations. “Swords,” complementing the sword, and “the terrifying of the nations,” both recur from 30:11. The “pride” recurs from 30:6, 18, and the “horde” from (e.g.) 30:4, 10, 15. For this one time Ezekiel builds on his distinctive way of describing the Babylonian forces as “terrifying” by calling them “titans” (גִּבּוׄרִים), fearsomely powerful warriors. And he builds on his description of the Pharaoh crocodile muddying the Nile water by not only emptying Egypt of people but by emptying it of the cattle that join in the muddying of the water as they enjoy a drink from it. What a peaceful place Egypt will become! Like the grisly description in 32:5–6, this pleasant picture involves imagery and hyperbole. Its point is that disorder and turmoil give way to harmony and serenity.

**32:15** Yahweh makes clear, by implication, that he speaks metaphorically and hyperbolically when he continues with an unusually extravagant statement of his regular intention in taking action. It is that “they will acknowledge that I am Yahweh,” when he makes Egypt a waste and strikes down his people. After the wasting and the striking down, then, there is somebody to do some acknowledging. Falling and destruction do not mean the annihilation of Egypt’s population. Even less, one might infer, does vanishing mean what it says. The hyperbole and the imagery do mean a humanity at peace and nature at peace—and an acknowledgment of the one who has made it so by his act of devastation.

**32:16** Yes, it was a requiem, in its way, “an ironic obituary for an arrogant world power” (Allen, 2:132). Yes, after the devastation of the “horde” a requiem will be appropriate. Given that 32:2–15 is not actually a requiem, one is hardly meant to think that this non-requiem will itself then be chanted. Such an inference would be another piece of literalism. But some equivalent song will need to feature on the lips of the women who have the gift for such songs (see Jer 9:17–20 [16–19]). It will complement the expressions of horror on the part of their kings (32:10). Tg. describes the requiem as a prophecy.

### Biblical Theology Comments

As the First Testament tells the story, a teenager called Daniel who is not the Daniel mentioned in Ezekiel was taken off to Babylonia three or four years before Ezekiel and had a series of visions there that refer explicitly to Babylon, Persia, Greece, Egypt, and other countries that feature in Ezekiel, and also to Nebuchadrezzar as the Babylonian ruler. Not referred to, but featuring in the background or foreground, are also Assyria and Rome. The visions provide a framework of Middle Eastern history that covers Ezekiel’s time, a framework embracing politics and history but setting politics and history in the framework of Yahweh’s sovereignty—as Ezekiel does, but these visions do it more systematically. They stand back and look at the sequence of events from Nebuchadrezzar to Antiochus Epiphanes. They thus give Judahites a framework for understanding the time in which they live, a promise that this history unfolds within Yahweh’s knowledge and constraints, and that in due course Yahweh will intervene and implement his positive purpose.[[216]](#footnote-217) Specifically, Nebuchadrezzar is not quite Yahweh’s puppet, but he does operate within Yahweh’s knowledge and constraints. Ezekiel, too, does not portray Nebuchadrezzar as Yahweh’s puppet, but does portray him as unwittingly serving Yahweh in implementing the purpose for Judah that at this moment involves Judah’s severe chastisement. Within Daniel’s broader framework or Ezekiel’s narrower one, then, the king of Egypt, the poor king of Egypt for whom one does have a little sympathy, is simply trying to make history turn out in a way that works against Yahweh’s purpose. Yahweh threatens to see that Egypt will pay a penalty, though as far as we know they did not, like the Tyrians who declined to lie down and die, and persuaded Nebuchadrezzar and Yahweh to give up seeking to put them down. Ezekiel does not imply that Pharaoh should have known that he was resisting Yahweh’s purpose, unless Ezekiel did have a way of getting his message to Pharaoh in the way that the book of Daniel does relate how Yahweh revealed himself to Nebuchadrezzar. He does imply that a ruler like Pharaoh ought to know when he is too big for his boots, and that if he doesn’t, he cannot complain if he pays a penalty.

### Application and Devotional Implications

Which leads to the question of the fate of the ordinary Egyptian. One can imagine such an ordinary Egyptian who works as a cook in Pharaoh’s palace and loses his life when Nebuchadrezzar’s army storms the palace. He was just an ordinary Egyptian with a wife and family who pays the price for his boss’s political and military ambitions and policies. It is even easier for me to imagine my Uncle Bill losing his life a few miles away from Pharaoh’s palace just after I was born, as he sought to defuse a bomb in the course of the Second World War. He is buried in Alexandria, the later Egyptian capital, thirty miles from Sais, the capital in Ezekiel’s day. Ordinary people pay the price for decisions taken by their bosses, though my uncle (family tradition says) was in Egypt doing that dangerous job voluntarily. Conversely, the fact that Nebuchadrezzar did not successfully invade Egypt likely meant that my hypothetical cook continued to go home each night. As usual, Yahweh was more inclined to issue threats than to fulfill them. But many ordinary Egyptians, Babylonians, Tyrians, Judahites, and Brits do lose their lives because of the decisions their bosses make—sometime bad decisions, sometimes good decisions and decisions that fit into Yahweh’s purpose. It’s an aspect of being part of a community that is bigger than oneself, and the downside to the huge upside of that fact. The implication of Ezekiel’s message is that we just have to suck up the downside that is tied up with the upside. The wider insight from the First Testament is that we can protest to Yahweh about it and tell him he ought to run the world in a different way (Bowen, 199–200).

### Selected Bibliography

Stökl, Jonathan. “Netting Marduk? The Concept of Hidden Transcripts and the Transfer of Cultural Knowledge from Mesopotamian to Judean Texts.” In Mladen Popović, Myles Schoonover, and Marijn Vandenberghe, ed., *Jewish Cultural Encounters in the Ancient Mediterranean and near Eastern World,* 44–63. JSJSup 178. Leiden: Brill, 2017.

## The View from Sheol (32:17–32)

### Outline

Half-page map of Mesopotamia:

Keep Babylon, Elam, Susa. Read Assyria where it says Assur and Kebar where it says Nippur.

Extend west and south to add Sidon, Jerusalem, Edom, and Meshek/Tubal, left of Mari in eastern Turkey

One final time Ezekiel marks the beginning of an Egypt message with a date and an announcement introducing a message he has received. As 32:1–16 began by announcing a requiem but did not then provide one, 32:17–32 begins by announcing a wail but does not go on to utter one. And whereas 32:1–16 goes on to provide instead something like a conventional critique and warning of disaster and death, 32:17–32 compares even less than that preceding message with any of the genres that recur in Ezekiel. While it is in substance another warning of downfall and death, in form and content it is a typically original Ezekielian message. In a final comment on Egypt’s vying with Babylon as world power,[[217]](#footnote-218) Yahweh once again declares that he is taking action against Pharaoh and his people. “All the preceding denunciations conclude in the powerful picture of that human greatness which has itself sat on the judgment seat and endeavoured to be an object of fear upon earth being now banished to the underworld and there delivered over to contempt” (Eichrodt, 436). This time the focus lies on the people first, and the section comes to Pharaoh only in the closing verses. It declares that Yahweh has commissioned Ezekiel to send the Egyptians down to Sheol and then imagines the reaction of different peoples there. Here at the end of the series of messages about Egypt, “all the foregoing oracles are surpassed in grandeur of conception by the remarkable Vision of Hades which concludes the series“ (Skinner, 276).[[218]](#footnote-219) The message it takes up particularly from 31:14–18 with its account of Assyria going down to Sheol, “the country far below,” with “people going down to Pit,” who are “foreskinned people” and “people slain by the sword,” who “lie down” there. This enhanced version of that vision, enriched with color and imagination, unfolds:

Introduction (32:17–18aα)

Yahweh’s commission to Ezekiel (32:18aβ–19)

A description of the process and of some first reactions from Sheol (32:20–21)

The scene in Sheol, part one (32:22 –27)

Assyria is there (32:22–23)

Elam is there (32:24–25)

Meshak/Tubal is there (32:26–27)

A parenthetical bidding to Pharaoh) (32:28)

The scene in Sheol, part two (32:29–30)

Edom is there (32:29)

The northern princes and the Sidonians are there (32:30)

Yahweh’s closing message about the implications for Pharaoh (32:31–32)

While there is no marker\* of the end of the section, 33:1 announces a new message with a new theme. As the next date comes only at 33:21. in terms of date 32:17–32 and 33:1–20 belong together and their relationship compares with that between 29:17–21 and 30:1–19, or between 24:1–14, 24:15–27, and 25:1–17. In each case one date covers originally separate sections, and 32:17–33:20 closes Part Four of the Ezekiel Scroll as 24:1–25:17 opened it.

The main part of 32:17–32 is like a repetitive call-and-response song (Bowen, 200–1). “Ezekiel’s repetitive style is well-illustrated here: on the one hand, he works with a stock of fixed phrases; on the other, he constantly changes their sequence and their components. It is no wonder that variations, omissions, and additions occurred in the transmission of such a text.… In the circumstances, an attempt to reconstitute an ‘original’ form of the oracle is vain” (Greenberg, 2:668).[[219]](#footnote-220) The phenomena parallel those in 1:4–28. Once more, one aspect of the shifting involves switches between masculine and feminine, which here partly reflect ongoing movement between speaking of countries (f.) and their leaders (m.) (Greenberg, 2:661). Ezekiel’s work in this way in the section is a factor behind MT and LXX’s diverging more than usual, and the Greek text in P967 differing from the “mainstream” LXX text.[[220]](#footnote-221) “Such great discrepancies between the two versions will be irksome to the sensitive reader” (Jerome, 375).

### Translation

17Now[[221]](#footnote-222) in the twelfth year, on the fifteenth of the month, Yahweh’s message came to me: 18My man, wail over the horde of Egypt and make it go down, it[[222]](#footnote-223) and the women of the majestic nations,[[223]](#footnote-224) to the country far below, with people going down to Pit. 19“Than whom are you[[224]](#footnote-225) nicer? Go down, and be laid down with foreskinned people!” 20Among people slain by the sword they will fall. “In that the sword has been given,[[225]](#footnote-226) drag it off with all its hordes.”[[226]](#footnote-227) 21The chiefs of the titans will speak of it from within Sheol, with its allies. “The foreskinned people, people slain by the sword, have gone down, have laid down.”

22Assyria is there and all its assembly. Its graves around it, all of them slain, the people falling by the sword, 23whose graves were put in Pit’s far reaches. Its assembly was around its tomb, all of them slain, falling by the sword, people who put terror in the country of the living.

24Elam is there, and all its horde. All of them are around its tomb, slain, the people falling by the sword, who went down foreskinned to the country far below, who put their terror in the country of the living, and carried their shame with people going down to Pit. 25Among the slain they put a bed for it with all its horde. Their graves are around it, all of them, foreskinned, people slain by the sword, because their terror was put in the country of the living. So they carried their shame, with people going down to Pit, it[[227]](#footnote-228) being put among the slain.

26Meshek/Tubal[[228]](#footnote-229) and all its horde is there. Its graves are around it, all of them foreskinned, slain by the sword, because they put their terror in the country of the living. 27They do not lie down[[229]](#footnote-230) with falling titans from among foreskinned people, who went down to Sheol in their battle gear and put their swords under their heads, though their acts of waywardness were[[230]](#footnote-231) on their bones, because[[231]](#footnote-232) the terror of the titans was in the country of the living.

28And you,[[232]](#footnote-233) among foreskinned people you will shatter, and lie down[[233]](#footnote-234) with people slain by the sword.

29Edom is there, its kings, and all its princes, who were put, for all their titanic strength, with people slain by the sword, those people lying down with foreskinned people and with people going down to Pit.

30The northern princes are there, all of them, with every Sidonian, who went down with slain people—for all their terror that issued from their titanic strength, disgraced. They laid down foreskinned with all the people slain by the sword, and carried their shame with people going down to Pit.

31When Pharaoh sees those people, he will find consolation over all his horde, people slain by the sword, Pharaoh and all his force (an affirmation of the Lord Yahweh). 32Because[[234]](#footnote-235) I put terror of me into the country of the living, and Pharaoh, and all his horde, will be laid down among foreskinned people with people slain by the sword (an affirmation of the Lord Yahweh).

### Textual Notes

**32:17** LXX reads “In the twelfth year, in the first month, on the fifteenth of the month.”

**32:18–21** For much of these verses LXX “goes its own way” (Zimmerli, 2:164). One can only guess at the reasons and the process that generated the differences (see, e.g., Allen, 2:134).

**32:25** LXX lacks most of this verse.

**32:27** LXX lacks “not.”

For מֵעֲרֵלִים “from among foreskinned people,” LXX “of old” implies מֵעוׄלָם, which recalls Gen 6:4, where the נְפִלִים, the “fallen,” appear (Cornill, 390). LXX’s version thus links less to the history of Ezekiel’s day and more to a suprahistorical (“apocalyptic”) framework (cf. Olley, 458–59). See further Doak, “Ezekiel’s Topography.”

For עֲוׄנׄתָם “their acts of waywardness,” EVV “their shields” implies צִנּוׄתָם (cf. Cooke, 358).

**32:28** LXX lacks “shatter and.”

**32:29** For “Edom …, its kings, and all its leaders,” LXX has simply “the leaders of Assyria.”

**32:30** LXX has another reference to Assyria rather than Sidon, and lacks “disgraced.”

**32:31** For Q הֲמוׄנוׄ and K המונה (also in 32:32), see the textual note on 31:18.

LXX lacks “people slain by the sword, Pharaoh and all his force.”

**32:32** For נָתַתִּי“I put,”LXXL “he has given” (cf. Theodoret, 217) implies נָתַן.

For Q חִתִּיתִי “terror of me,” K has חתיתו “terror of him”; so also LXX. This fits the נָתַן just noted and matches 32:22–30.

After 32:32 MT has a petuhah.\*

### Verse-by-Verse Commentary

**32:17–18** Readers are perhaps to infer that Yahweh’s word came on the fifteenth of the twelfth month as in 32:1. If so, it came just two weeks later than that message and still in the aftermath of the fall of Jerusalem. But once again, “you would not know of this terrible historical context from the prophecy itself, so obsessed with Egypt is Ezekiel” (Jenson, 248). It will bring the same message as the previous one, though expressed in different terms. Ezekiel is to “wail” (נָהָה) over the Egyptian horde, the people who are going to meet their fate (when Nebuchadrezzar moves southwest from Judah?), and it is by wailing that Ezekiel will “make it go down. His wailing is a speech-act, an exercise in performative language. For “wail,” Tg. “prophesy” “explicitly underlines the prophetic character of this lament” (Zimmerli, 2:163). “Ezekiel is to tell Egypt to go to hell” (Bowen, 201). When it has, “the women of the majestic nations” will pick up their work. They are to go down with the horde so that they can lament over it and thus take up the work of “the women of the nations” in 32:16. The extra description of the nations as “majestic” (אַדִּרִם) anticipates the impressive identity of some of the peoples who will be named in 32:22–30. The passage as a whole implies a suspension of time or of chronological considerations. The portrait of Sheol that follows includes nations such as Assyria that have already fallen and would be in Sheol already, and nations that Ezekiel has condemned to death and portrayed as dead but are still very much alive. The women belong to nations that are already there (so they don’t need to be sent there) and to nations that are not there yet (but in the portrait are pictured as there). The chronological ambiguity is expressed and aided by the participial expression (יוׄרְדֵי בוׄר) that can fudge whether it refers to “people going down to Pit” or “people who have gone down to Pit” or “people who will be going down to Pit.”

**32:19** Directly or indirectly, Ezekiel speaks to the horde. “Neither the prophet nor Yahweh seems to be saddened by the descent of Egypt to the netherworld. If anything, the prophet parodies the lament form.… In effect, the prophet is taunting the high and mighty nation of Egypt” (Block, 2:214). More directly, he is taunting stupid Judahites who put any trust in Egypt when it is on its way to the grave. Ezekiel’s wail, then, is not to be very sympathetic. It will be no requiem. And when the horde joins the “foreskinned people” and is made to lie down there in Pit, it can hardly complain as if it deserved better, can it (cf. 31:18)? Yahweh has already condemned Pharaoh and his horde to sharing the company of uncircumcised and thus uncivilized people, and people slain by the sword (31:18), and the first group reappear here. Than whom might the Egyptian horde be “nicer” or more pleasant (נָעַם)? The Egyptians practiced circumcision, and they might well think of uncircumcised peoples as primitive and uncivilized (see 28:10). But most peoples think of themselves as superior to everyone else. Perhaps one need not specify an answer to the question, though the peoples who will be named in 32:22–30 might naturally count. One way or another, “the question cuts Egypt down to size” (Allen, 2:137), or to a less-than-average size.

**32:20–21** In 31:18, “people slain by the sword” appeared alongside the foreskinned, and so they do here as the message becomes a more detailed description of what will happen to the horde. As one need not take the lack of circumcision too narrowly, in that people can be physically circumcised but still be primitive and uncivilized, so one should not take being “slain by the sword” too narrowly (Zimmerli, 2:173–74). The classically troublesome form of death is being slain in battle in such a way that one cannot be properly buried (e.g., Jer 9:22; 16:4; 25:33). Because our bodies and our persons are mutually dependent, and burial and resting in Sheol are mutually dependent, not being properly buried means not joining your ancestors in the family tomb. It also compromises the possibility of joining your community going to rest in Sheol. Being “slain by the sword” does likely refer to such death in battle, though perhaps to other shameful forms of death such as execution. Here, “people slain by the sword” are the victims of Yahweh’s sword that has been put into the hands of Nebuchadrezzar (30:24, 25) and is waiting in the wings to strike. They will fall in battle and they will fall into Sheol. If one is to ask who will do the dragging off of Egypt, it might be the general contemptible crowd of the foreskinned and the slain among whom the Egyptians “will fall.” Accompanying Egypt will then be its “hordes.” That word occurs in the plural only here in Ezekiel. It does anticipate 32:22–28 with its references to several individual hordes, but here “its hordes” will be the hordes associated with Egypt, the people who are “its allies,” the kind of people named as its supporters in 30:1–9. “The chiefs of the titans” (cf. 32:12) will be more impressive forces that can deal with those hordes. But the two verses don’t provide links between their four sentences, and it’s hard to see how they link. The sentence in quotation marks in the translation may be things the titan chiefs are saying as they commission the fall of the horde and comment on it when it has happened.

**32:22–23** It’s not surprising that Assyria is the first people with its “assembly,” its army, that Ezekiel notes in Sheol (see 31:1–18). Not long ago, it had been the great Middle Eastern empire, a people who inspired terror in its world. The word “terror” (חִתִּית) is unique to Ezekiel, occurring seven times in 32:22–32 (also once of Tyre in 26:17), though the related verb “terrify” (חָתַת) appears elsewhere (e.g., Isa 8:9; 30:31; 37:27). It suggests a seriously impressive and formidable people that is not afraid to use its forcefulness on anyone. Ezekiel’s picture presupposes that terror is essential to the idea of empire. “*Terror*, in ancient as in modern times, was the basis for the empire's ‘peace’" (Lind, 255). As an Assyrian king puts it:

Sennacherib, the great king, the mighty king, king of the universe, king of Assyria, king of the four quarters [of the earth]; the wise ruler [lit. shepherd, “pastor”], favorite of the great gods, guardian of the right, lover of justice; who lends support, who comes to the aid of the needy, who turns [his thoughts] to pious deeds; perfect hero, mighty man; first among all princes, the powerful one who consumes the unsubmissive, who strikes the wicked with the thunderbolt; the god Assur, the great mountain, an unrivaled kingship has entrusted to me, and above all those who dwell in palaces, has made powerful my weapons; from the upper sea of the setting sun to the lower sea of the rising sun, all humankind [the black-headed race] he has brought in submission to my feet.

People, horses, mules, asses, cattle and sheep, I brought out from their midst and counted as booty. And their small cities, which were numberless, I destroyed, I devastated, I turned into ruins. The houses of the steppe, [namely] the tents, wherein they dwelt, I set on fire and turned them into [a mass of] flames.[[235]](#footnote-236)

It’s not surprising, therefore, that terror is also the reason the imperial powers are in Sheol. At this point Ezekiel also introduces the term “the country of the living” to set over against “the country far below.” The Assyrians are now “in Pit’s far reaches.” That expression might simply parallel the term “the country far below” and designate Sheol as a place miles away from the world in which living people live. There is no normal contact between these two worlds, and once you leave this country for that country, you do not return. But Ezekiel may be painting a picture in which there are geographical areas within the country below as there are in the country above. In the world above, the country of the living, Assyria was the center of the Middle Eastern world, but now it’s way away from the center, on the edge.[[236]](#footnote-237) Either way, the Assyrian assembly’s “graves” are “around its tomb.” The common word for “grave” (קֶבֶר) and the rarer word for ”tomb” (קְבוּרָה) are similar and related, and the use of both here suggests one impressive resting place for a king, surrounded by the more ordinary resting places—the arrangement an Egyptian would expect that corresponds to Pharaoh’s tomb surrounded by those of his nobles (Block, 2:224). So the Assyrians are now “all of them slain, people falling by the sword.” Like the participial expression “people going down/gone down/will be going down to Pit” (32:18), the participle Ezekiel uses here (נׄפְלִים) possesses a chronological ambiguity that can fudge whether it refers to people who have fallen, are falling, or will be falling. In the terms of the world above, there is nothing to argue about. The great Assyrian empire is no longer. Egypt (and the Judahites) needs to see what has happened to Assyria can and will happen to Egypt.

**32:24–25** Elam is an empire within what is now Iran, once comparable to Assyria in its power to its east, often in conflict with it, and probably now put out of business by it (though it will somewhat recover later as part of the Medo-Persian empire). That might be all the average Kebarite would know about it. In general, the peoples in this section might be almost as obscure as they are to modern peoples. The point about them is that they are all dead. The description of Elam parallels that of Assyria, with three additional notes. Elam “carried its shame.” The expression will recur in 32:30 and Ezekiel need not be implying that Elam carried more shame than Assyria or other peoples mentioned in this section, but mentioning its shame makes the portrait darker than that of Assyria. Like Assyria and other peoples, Elam’s empire collapsed, and in effect died. Therein lies its shame, and therein lies the threat that hangs over Egypt. A second distinctive note in the description of Elam is that it has a bed, but it’s among the slain people. Again it’s likely that other peoples had a bed. The third distinctive note is that it was because Elam’s terror was put in the country of the living that it met with its terminal calamity. As its relationship with Assyria might show, if it hadn’t been engaged in so much military activity, it might have lived longer. It was as a result of its military activity that the Elamites finally “carried their shame.”

**32:26–27** Whereas Elam was east or southeast of Assyria, Meshek/Tubal was to its west, in modern Turkey, and it can be identified with the Mushki and Tabal there. Meshek and Tubal already featured in 27:13. It’s not clear why the two are treated here as one. Between them, Assyria, Elam, and Meshek/Tubal cover a wide arc to the northwest, north, and northeast of Kebar or of Israel. The description of Meshek/Tubal again overlaps with that of Assyria and Ebal, but it has a lengthy addition that downgrades these peoples’ significance, as the references to shame downgraded the significance of Elam compared with Assyria. Meshek and Tubal, too, caused terror in the world above and as a consequence in due course got their comeuppance, but it took a less honorable form than that of the “falling titans,” at which 32:21 hinted. Ezekiel perhaps implies that they were militarily nowhere as significant as Assyria and Elam—which is plausible, but our knowledge of them is thinner than our knowledge of Assyria and even of Elam. At least, these titans are warriors who had not been defeated and stripped in battle but had died a heroic death there and can still be recognized as heroic figures, so that Ezekiel’s picture corresponds to the way warriors could be buried with their weapons (Greenberg, 2:665–66). Here Ezekiel’s picture incorporates the idea that everyone doesn’t look the same in Sheol. You continue to be the kind of people you were before, and the real titans still look like soldiers, with their swords under their pillows like gangsters with their guns there. On the other hand, “their acts of waywardness were on their bones.” The apparent approbation of them as titans with their weapons, combined with this element in the description, suggests that there is indeed some moral ambiguity in the description of nations bringing terror to people. It may be an oversimplification to say that their waywardness consisted in their bringing terror (Rashi, in MG) or that the approbation of them makes clear that bringing terror was simply not a critique (Jenson, 250). Bringing terror is built into being a nation and into being a warrior, a titan, but the description here recognizes the combination of honor and waywardness in being a titan. People might expect the bones of a dead hero to bring blessing (cf. 2 Kgs 13:21), but the titans’ acts of waywardness means they cannot.[[237]](#footnote-238)

**32:28** Two-thirds of the way through the description of peoples in Sheol, Yahweh pauses to come out of giving a message that in part presents the imagined, threatened future as if it were the present, and makes explicit the point of this inventory. He speaks to the Egyptian horde or to Pharaoh in particular. It is “among the foreskinned” that “you will shatter,” and “you will lie down with the people slain by the sword.” The parallelism\* almost invites one to see this as two-part poetic line. Your destiny is the same as theirs. Indeed, as the sequence from Assyria to Elam to Meshek/Tubal increased in solemnity or critique, Pharaoh and his people need to think about the possibility that their humiliation will be deeper.

**32:29** Yahweh moves from the arc drawn by 32:22–27 to peoples southeast and northwest of Jerusalem, southwest and west of Kebar, peoples that already featured near the beginning of the messages about other nations. As a sample of the neighboring peoples in 25:1–17 there is Edom, which is again characterized in terms Ezekiel has used of Assyria, Elam, and Meshek/Tubal. To speak of the titanic strength (גְּבוּרָה) of the kings and leaders of Edom is rather flattering.

**32:30** “Northern princes” might elsewhere make readers think of Babylon, the northern foe (26 7; Jer 25:9; Qimhi, in MG). It would fit Ezekiel’s occasional references to Babylon as victim of Yahweh’s sword after being wielder of it (21:28–32 [33–37]). But if that is the reference, it is understated, and this understanding doesn’t fit well with Ezekiel’s general policy of accepting that Babylon is the current world power within Yahweh’s purpose (cf. 32:11), or with the geography of 32:22–27. More likely the term “Sidonian” (cf. 28:20–23) provides a clue. The context there suggests Sidonian in the narrow sense, but the term can suggest “Phoenician” more generally and imply that Sidon is the senior Phoenician city. Sidon is Canaan’s firstborn in Gen 10:15, and historically Sidon was originally bigger than Tyre (Zimmerli, 2:97). On either understanding of the reference to Sidon, the “northern princes” (נָסִיךְ) in the Sidon area will be the rulers of cities such as Arvad and Gebal (27:1–11) who helped to service Tyre’s fleet. The description of them again repeats terms from the preceding descriptions but adds one, “disgraced” (בּוׄשִׁים). And the implication will again not be that the northerners are more disgraced than the other peoples. The extra term rather adds to the slighting of them. And again, the attribution of “titanic strength” to them is rather flattering, makes one suspect some irony, and adds to the impression that it is not only through 32:22–27 that the peoples Ezekiel imagines in Sheol are of reducing impressiveness. That process has continued through 32:29–30.

**32:31** Ezekiel concludes the portrait of Sheol in a way appropriate to concluding the Egypt messages, which is his real subject in this section, by returning to the implications of this portrait for the Egyptians and Pharaoh. Some of Ezekiel’s readers might pick up the ironic link between his reference to “Pharaoh and all his force” and Exod 14:4, 17, 28 (Greenberg, 2:667). But sardonically, Ezekiel comments that Pharaoh won’t feel so bad about his own comeuppance when he sees that all these other people are in the same mess as his people. Yahweh’s words once more take up 31:15–18. There, the nations find consolation in the world below at the arrival of Pharaoh. Here Pharaoh will “find consolation” (נָחַם niphal) through discovering them there. It will involve him changing his mind about his mythical way of thinking, to translate the verb another way—as the Kebarites need to.[[238]](#footnote-239) It’s a less comforting consolation than the one in 14:22–23. “If misery loves company, then his consolation must be very great.”[[239]](#footnote-240) But the Reformed theologian Amandus Polanus calls it “cruel comfort” (Greenwood, 663).

**32:32** The last verse sums up the section, and practically every expression is picked up from earlier verses. “Lay down” (שָׁכַב) is arguably the key word (Allen, 2:136). People are lying down in Sheol because that is what we do in the grave. Yahweh’s own activity has been unmentioned since the reference to his commissioning Ezekiel to send the Egyptian horde down to Sheol (32:17–18). Yahweh approaches the close of his Egyptian messages with an assertion about his own activity that lies behind all that has preceded in 32:19–31. Yahweh’s putting terror of him into the country of the living would be a terror more frightening and more decisive than the one the nations inspire there. And that is what lies behind the declaration that Pharaoh and his horde are also going to find themselves in Sheol. It means Pharaoh would be wise to turn away from interfering with Yahweh’s purpose (32:2). And Israel would be wise to avoid associating itself with Egypt. Otherwise Israel will find itself there, too, as indeed it did. But Israel will come back (see Ezek 37:1–14).[[240]](#footnote-241)

### Biblical Theology Comments

“This is not the chapter to turn to if one wishes to understand the Bible’s teaching about the afterlife” (Taylor, 205). Supposing one treated it that way, what impression would one gain?

* If people go to Sheol, it means that death does not signify one ceases to exist as a person.
* In Sheol people are in some sense alive and semi-conscious.
* As Sheol is the other side of the grave, it means that body and person are both aspects of a human being, interrelated.
* Being in Sheol doesn’t mean being on your own. People are in familiar community groups, gathered around their leader.
* Sheol is like the grave, a place where people lie down, which is not unpleasant. Sheol is where one goes at the end of the day. (When the Psalms protest about Sheol, it relates to having to go there before your time.)
* But going to Sheol is a downward movement, whereas the heavens are upward, and this world is in between (cf. Jesus’ words in Matt 11:23, following Isa 14:13–15). In common human metaphor, “up” is good and implies improvement, “down” is bad and implies loss.
* Being in Sheol is not disagreeable, though it’s not exciting either. It’s not a place of punishment and there is no Satan there making life unpleasant.
* It does not exclude people such as the unburied, the uncircumcised, the executed, the mutilated, and suicides, though they may not be quite as comfortable there as some others (Greenberg, 2:669).
* It does mean that people who exercise power in the world get their comeuppance and get shamed, while the powerless and the victims of the faithless get some relief (cf. Job 3:17–19).
* People’s achievements and their wrongdoings are known and visible there.
* There are divisions a little like the ones in some churches, synagogues, and mosques.

The picture of Sheol not as impressive a picture of the afterlife as the one the Pharaohs assumed, though that one was special for them. It’s not so different from the implications about Hades in the New Testament, though it is more concrete. Nor is it so different from the account of *Inanna’s Descent to the Nether World* and *Ishtar’s Descent to the Nether World*, though it is less concrete(*ANET*, 52–57, 106–9), and there is no escape and no coming back, as there is in those stories.[[241]](#footnote-242) It doesn’t seem too bad as a picture of how things will be until resurrection day and life in the new Jerusalem.

### Application and Devotional Implications

Blenkinsopp (142–43), who died as I was writing this commentary, remarks on how “the denial of death… works very powerfully throughout our culture.” He goes on:

In a traditional society … the individual exists at the point of intersection of the living community at the horizontal level and those who have gone before and will come after on the vertical axis. The phrase "to be gathered to the ancestors," of frequent occurrence in the Old Testament… insinuates the natural element in the process of dying and, correspondingly, deemphasizes the crippling anxiety which the prospect of death more easily provokes in our kind of disgregated culture. A good death is therefore a kind of communion with those who have gone before, an event that can be commemorated and celebrated by those who remain without undue sorrow. A bad death, the sort foreseen for Egypt, is a kind of excommunication, a casting out from the commonwealth in which both the living and the dead have citizenship and franchise. (Blenkinsopp, 142–43)

And Anthony Bloom has commented:

It is only if we can face death, make sense of it, determine its place and our place in regard to it, that we will be able to live in a fearless way and to the fullness of our ability. Too often we wait until the end of our life to face death, whereas we would have lived quite differently if only we had faced death at the outset. … The injunction “be mindful of death” is not a call to live with a sense of terror in the constant awareness that death is to overtake us. It means rather: “Be aware of the fact that what you are saying now, doing now, hearing, enduring or receiving now may be the last event or experience of your present life.” In which case it must be a crowning, not a defeat; a summit, not a trough. … Only awareness of death will give life this immediacy and depth, will bring life to life, will make it so intense that its totality is summed up in the present moment. All life is at every moment an ultimate act.[[242]](#footnote-243)

### Selected Bibliography

Block, Daniel I. “Beyond the Grave: Ezekiel’s Vision of Death and Afterlife.” In Block, *By the River Chebar: Historical, Literary, and Theological Studies in the Book of Ezekiel*, 169–98. Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2013.

Burns, John Barclay. “The Consolation of Pharaoh in the Underworld, Ezek 32:17–32; with Some Textual Observations.” *Proceedings: Eastern Great Lakes and MidWest Biblical Societies* 16 (1996): 121–25.

Davis, Ellen F. “‘And Pharaoh will Change His Mind…’ (Ezekiel 32:31): Dismantling Mythical Discourse.” In Christopher Seitz and Kathryn Greene-McCreight, ed., *Theological Exegesis: Essays in Honor of Brevard* *S. Childs*, 224–39. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999.

Doak, Brian R. “Ezekiel’s Topography of the (Un-)Heroic Dead in Ezekiel 32:17–32.” *JBL* 132 (2013): 607–24.

Lust, Johan. “Major Divergences between LXX and MT in Ezekiel.” In Adrian Schenker, ed., *The Earliest Text of the Hebrew Bible: The Relationship between the Masoretic Text and the Hebrew Base of the Septuagint Reconsidered*, 83–92. SBlSCS 52. Atkanta: SBL, 2003.

*–––* “The ‘Rekenaar’ and the Septuagint: LXX Ezekiel, a Case Study. “ In Johann Cook, ed., Bible and Computer: The Stellenbosch AIBI-6 Conference, 17–21 July 2000, 365–93. Leiden: Brill, 2002.

Strong, John T. “Egypt's Shameful Death and the House of Israel's Exodus from Sheol (Ezekiel 32.17–32 and 37.1–14). *JSOT* 34 (2010): 475–504.

Wells, Sara, and Christopher B. Hays. “Gradations of Degradation: Ezekiel’s Underworld as a Temple of Doom.” *OTE* 33 (2020): 490–514.

## Responsibility, Retrospect, and Prospect (33:1–20)

### Outline

“Yahweh’s message came to me” (33:1) marks the beginning of a new section, but the lack of a date makes the section look somewhat attached to what precedes (Sweeney, 161). In contrast, 33:21 has a new date as well as the description of a message coming, and the content of that message suggests a new move in the scroll. Given the date marker in 33:21, it is odd and misleading that 33:1–33 constitutes a single unit in the medieval chapter divisions that appear in printed Bibles, with 33:1–20 separated from what precedes. Actually, 33:1–20 marks the close of Part Four of the scroll, bringing the pre-587 phase of Ezekiel's ministry to a climax before we read of the blow falling in 33:21 (Joyce, 190).[[243]](#footnote-244) One could say, however, that Ezek 33 as a whole is a pivot point in the scroll, summarizing where we have been and pointing to where we are going.[[244]](#footnote-245)

In 33:1–20 Ezekiel deals with two questions that might naturally arise in connection with the fall of Jerusalem. Who is to blame (see 33:1–9)? And does the community have any future (see 33:10–20)? The section thus takes up two issues from Part One and Part Two:

* Ezekiel’s responsibility as lookout and the people’s responsibility to pay heed (33:1–9)
* The people’s challenge to maintain faithfulness knowing that Yahweh will do the same (33:10–20)

The two main parts of the section are interwoven by the use of the unusual expression “the members of your people” (33:2, 12, 17)[[245]](#footnote-246) and the expression “Israel’s household” (33:7, 10, 11, 20). Resumptive introductions also divide the treatment of each theme into two:

A parable\* about a lookout (33:1–6):

Yahweh’s message came to me

The explanation of the parable (33:7–9)

And you, my man

A response to a protest by the people (33:10–11)

And you, my man

A nuancing of the response and a further protest (33:12–20)

The nuancing (33:12–16)

And you, my man

The further protest and a further response (33:17–20)

And the members of your people

In taking up these issues, Ezekiel takes up and expands on material from near the beginning of Part One and near the end of Part Two, in 3:16–21 and 18:1–32, in the order of the scroll as we have it. But 33:1–20 may at least in part represents the earlier version of Ezekiel’s messages in these two sections and he may have adapted the material that appears here in compiling his scroll, so that 3:16–21 and 18:1–32 represent later versions than 33:1–20. Either way, why does the material occur twice? The earlier versions represented perspectives the people needed to take into account from the beginning of Ezekiel’s ministry in 592 onwards and during the years from 592 to 587, and perspectives the scroll’s readers need to have in mind from the beginning of the scroll and during Parts One to Four. But 33:1–20 constitutes the message the people need to have in mind as Yahweh implements his threat to allow Jerusalem to fall. While the Hebrew text of 33:7–9 virtually repeats 3:17–19 (see the Outline to 3:16–27), then, the translation of 33:7–9 differs slightly from that in 3:17–19 to reflect the different implications when Yahweh speaks the words after the catastrophe rather than before. Then, while 33:17–20 comes close to repeating 18:25–30 in an abbreviated form, most of 33:10–20 has a looser relationship with 18:1–32.[[246]](#footnote-247)

### Translation

1Yahweh’s message came to me: 2My man, speak to the members of your people and say to them, When I cause a sword to come against a country, and the citizenry[[247]](#footnote-248) get an individual from their total number and make him a lookout for them, 3and he sees the sword coming on the country, blows on the horn, and warns the people, 4and someone who listens, listens to the sound of the horn but did not heed the warning, and a sword came and took him—his blood will be against his head. 5Given that he listened to the sound of the horn but did not heed the warning, his blood will be against him. Heeding the warning, that person would have saved[[248]](#footnote-249) his life. 6But when the lookout sees the sword coming and did not blow on the horn, and the people, it did not heed the warning, and a sword came and took a life from them, for his waywardness that person has been taken, but his blood I will require from the hand of the lookout.

7And you, My man, I made you a lookout for Israel’s household. You would listen[[249]](#footnote-250) to a message from my mouth and give them warning from me. 8When I say to the faithless person, “You faithless one, you will definitely die,” but you did not speak to give warning to a faithless person [to get] out of his path, that person, someone faithless, would die for his waywardness, but his blood I would require from your hand. 9But when you gave warning to a faithless person [to get] out of his path so as to turn from it, but he did not turn from his path, he would die in his waywardness, but you would have rescued your life.

10And you, My man, say to Israel’s household, This is what you have said: “Our acts of rebellion and our offenses are upon us, and through them we are wasting away. So how are we to live?” 11Say to them, “I am alive (an affirmation of the Lord Yahweh), if I want the death of the faithless person, but rather a faithless person’s turning from his path and living.…[[250]](#footnote-251) Turn, turn, from your dire paths. So why should you die, Israel’s household?

12And you, My man, say to the members of your people, The faithfulness of someone faithful: it will not rescue him on the day when he rebels. And the faithlessness of someone faithless: he will not fall down because of it on the day when he turns from his faithlessness. Someone faithful will not be able to live because of it on the day when he offends. 13When I say of someone faithful, “He will definitely live,” but that person has relied on his faithfulness and done wrong, none of his faithful acts will be kept in mind. For his wrong that he has done, for it he will die. 14But when I say of someone faithless, “You will definitely die,” and he turns from his offense and acts on a faithful ruling,[[251]](#footnote-252) 15in that someone faithless returns a pledge, makes good a theft, walks by the laws of life, so as not to do wrong, he will definitely live, he will not die. 16None of his offenses that he has committed will be kept in mind for him. Given that he has acted on a faithful ruling, he will live.

17But the members of your people say, “The Lord’s path doesn’t measure.” But those people, their path doesn’t measure. 18When someone faithful turns from his faithfulness and does wrong, he will die through them.[[252]](#footnote-253) 19But when someone faithless turns from his faithlessness and acts on a faithful ruling, on the basis of those things that person will live. 20And you say, “The Lord’s path doesn’t measure.” As an individual in accordance with his paths, I will rule for you people, Israel’s household.

### Textual Notes

MT has markers\* after 33:6, 9, and 20.

**33:13** LXX lacks “he will definitely live.”

### Verse-by-Verse Commentary

**33:1–3** In 3:16–19 Yahweh described Ezekiel’s role as that of a lookout, without explaining the image. He implies that people knew, and he focused on the significance of his commission for him. While it might be implicit that he told the community about the commission because of its significance for them, and certainly that is the effect of eventually including it in the scroll, here it is explicit that he is to tell them. And he explains the image, in such a way that 33:1–9 as a whole works in a fashion characteristic of Ezekiel. He begins, that is, with a parable\*. Anyone indeed might be familiar with the idea of a city having lookouts (see, e.g., 2 Sam 13:34; 18:24–27; 9:17–18), and anyone acquainted with the prophets might be familiar with the idea applied to Yahweh’s relationship with Israel (Jer 6:17).[[253]](#footnote-254) A town’s lookout could speak words (2 Sam 13:34) as well as blowing a horn (Jer 4:19, 21), which in a crisis might sound further than words and convey a message urgently, especially at night (Zimmerli, 2:184). Prophets literally spoke words, but metaphorically they blew a horn (Amos 3:6). So both forms of communication apply to them. The parable gets an Ezekielian slant through Ezekiel speaking of a sword coming, as if it hurtles through the air on its own—except that Ezekiel has made explicit already that Yahweh sends it (e.g., Ezek 14:17; 21:1–32 [6–37]; 30:1–26).

**33:4–5** The parable goes on to describe someone behaving in inexplicable, unbelievable fashion, as figures in Jesus’ parables will. “This all seems quite obvious” (Blenkinsopp, 146). But it reflects the awareness that people do inexplicable, unbelievable things. In the case of this suicidal action, the resistant listener’s blood will be “against his head.” Instead of taking refuge inside the city walls, he will be joining the attackers in attacking himself and bringing about his own violent death at their hand (see the translation footnote and verse-by-verse commentary on 9:10).

**33:6** Here is another inexplicable, unbelievable event: the lookout fails to do his job and the city doesn’t get ready to defend itself and pays the price. But Yahweh will then hold the lookout responsible. One can imagine him put on trial, being found guilty, and being executed. In the parable, Yahweh will “require his blood” (cf. 3:18, 20; also Gen 9:5; 42:22; 2 Sam 4:11).

**33:7–9** So much for the parable. There follows its interpretation, which corresponds to 3:17–19 virtually word for word, but in the context of the fall of Jerusalem when Ezekiel has been fulfilling his lookout vocation for five years, one may now use aorist and modal\* verbs in English rather than perfect and future ones. And in the context of the city’s fall, we might understand Ezekiel as for once engaging in what Western thinking might call theodicy, or perhaps prophet-odicy. For who is to blame for what happened? Yahweh? Yes, the enemy attacking Jerusalem is Yahweh. It is he who is brandishing his sword towards it. Yet he did try to warn people. Ezekiel implies “the complete irrationality of the divine activity” (Zimmerli, 2:185). At the same time as being the attacker, he is also “the would-be defender of his people and not their destroyer” (Allen, 2:145). That’s why he stations a lookout in the city. If the lookout failed to deliver the message, then he would be to blame for the city’s fall. But he surely did deliver the message. The point about being a doom prophet was to rescue people from threats that hang over them and then to show them that God’s sentence of death is not final (Greenberg, 2:678–79). It parallels the same declaration “you will definitely die” (מוֹת תָּמוּת) addressed to Jonathan or Jeremiah (1 Sam 14:44; Jer 26:8).

So is the community itself to blame for the city’s fall? Yes it is, corporately and individually. Ezekiel was to address Yahweh’s household and he has done so, but he speaks of the individual faithless person turning from faithlessness. His challenge addresses the community via its leadership and it requires a corporate response from the community, in which its leadership will need to take a lead. But the response of turning from faithlessness will require action by individuals, as the concrete examples in 33:15 imply, a response to which the unusual address to “the members of your people” may also point. Ezekiel doesn’t think in individual terms rather than corporate terms. He knows that Yahweh necessarily relates to and has expectations of both community and individuals, though one reason he speaks in individual terms is that he speaks in priestly fashion (Greenberg, 2:679–80). But his awareness parallels the assumptions of the Torah. Deuteronomy, for instance, alternates between addressing “you” singular and “you” plural.

**33:10** Yahweh continues to talks to his “household,” to try to get the Kebarites to see sense. Not least in light of all that we have read in Ezekiel’s messages (and in Jeremiah’s), it’s hard to imagine the Jerusalemites saying that their acts of rebellion and their offenses are upon them, but it’s possible to imagine the Kebarites saying it. They have been living with their exile in Babylonia for a decade, and the actual fall of Jerusalem would surely make it hard to continue putting a brave face on things and believing that they might be going back to Judah soon. Maybe the “our” in “our acts of rebellion and our offenses” refers to the community as a whole, and specifically, the community of their parents and grandparents, for whose wrongdoing the Kebar generation are paying (see 18:2). But Ezekiel makes no reference here to that key question in 18: 1–32, whether the moral state of one generation is not accounted to its successor (Greenberg, 2:679). Either way, the problem is that now they are “wasting away” (מָקַק niphal; see 4:17), like a wound festering (Psa 38:5 [6]) or a body decomposing (Zech 14:12). They mutter about it in their gatherings by the waterways. It’s what Lev 26:39 said would happen. Their acts of rebellion and their offenses being on them is another way of saying that their blood is against them, or upon them or upon their heads (as the expression sometimes goes: e.g., 2 Sam 1:16). The problem is that “Israel’s household” is a “rebellious household” and that “the person who offends, will die” (3:21, 26–27; cf.18:30–32).

**33:11** Okay, Ezekiel has done his warning, they have taken no notice, they are paying the penalty, but Ezekiel can now retire. No, because things cannot simply stop there for Yahweh or for Ezekiel (Fairbairn, 359–60). One might have thought that Ezekiel had made quite clear the answer to the community’s question concerning how they are to live, but then, this is likely one of those occasions when the prophet puts the question onto his people’s lips. If only they were asking the question! Yahweh begins his response to the question with the assertion “I am alive,” which in the context of the question carries extra connotations or nuances (see 5:11). Their future and their life rests upon the fact that Yahweh is alive. Yahweh does not spell out that fact, but the way he spells out the implications of his being alive does carry implications for their question. They talk or think as if they have no future and as if the future is fixed. Actually a chief theological message of Ezekiel’s scroll is that the future is open (Jenson, 254). Yahweh does not want their wasting away because of acts of rebellion and offenses to find its natural conclusion in their death. Acts of rebellion and offenses are expressions of faithlessness, and Yahweh wants the faithless people to turn from their faithlessness. Three time he uses the word “turn” (שׁוּב), a key word in 18:21–32. How extraordinary that God is so earnest for people to turn “that he doubleth his commands and exhortations with vehemency: ‘Turn ye, turn ye, why will you die?’”[[254]](#footnote-255) Further, he adds an oath to the declarations in 18:21–32. “The cavils, objections, and unbelief of sinners, put God unto his oath.… It is a great thing for God to speak , but more for him to swear.” How fortunate the people for whom he does so! (Greenhill, 669). Thus the future depends on Yahweh, but life or death is their choice, notwithstanding 33:10–11. The problem is that “while I am doing everything for the salvation of Israel and refuse to despair of them, he says, they for their part use words of despair and think salvation through repentance out of the question” (Theodoret, 220).

**33:12–16** Yahweh goes on to summarize the generalizations in 18:1–24, then to add the specifics in 33:15. “Returns a pledge” comes from 18:7, 12. “Makes good a theft” goes beyond “does not commit theft” in 18:7, 12, 15, 18, taking up a motif from the Torah (e.g., Exod 22:1–14 [21:37–22:13] (Olley, 465). “Walks by the laws of life” summarizes the specifics in 18:5–18, which were the expectations by which one might “definitely live” (18:9, 17). So 33:15 is a sampling that sums up the whole of 18:1–24. Once again Ezekiel intertwines address to the community and challenge to the individual. The warning about the person who has “relied on his faithfulness and done wrong” again sums up the warnings in 18:1–24, in tellingly different words. Isaiah, Jeremiah, and the Psalms often refer to reliance (the verb בָּטַח), but Ezekiel uses the word only here and in 16:15, and in a different connection. For Isaiah, the key temptation is relying on human resources and human allies, and Ezekiel is aware of that temptation, but that is not the connection in which he uses this verb. Here the implication is that one might rely on one’s faithfulness to keep one in a good relationship with God, as a husband can rely on his faithfulness to keep in a good relationship with his wife, but that past faithfulness towards God does not count for the relationship if one gives up the faithfulness, any more than would be the case in relation to one’s wife. The good news is the converse truth. Here “national crisis produces theology,”[[255]](#footnote-256) of an encouraging kind. One might sympathize with a wife who is hesitant to have her husband back after he has been unfaithful, but Yahweh is not so hesitant. No past faithfulness avails in the present, but no past faithlessness ruins you in the present either. **“**There is no predetermination even after the prophetic or priestly judgment has been pronounced” (Blenkinsopp, 148)**.** In 18:21–24 the closing case was the faithful turning away, but when 33:12–16 takes up the passage, it closes with the faithless turning back, so that “the thrust of the appeal is not a word of judgment but a call to repentance” (Olley, 465). “How are we to live?” (32:10). Here is the answer. It does depend on you turning, but turning can know that Yahweh will respond.

**33:17–20** Is 33:12–16 good news for the exiles? One would think so. After all, they have already acknowledged their heavy burden of rebellions and offenses (33:10). Surely they would identify with, and seek to emulate, the faithless individuals who turn from their previous ways and are released from God’s death sentence. “Yahweh is offering Ezekiel’s compatriots both a clean slate (past iniquities are promptly forgotten) and life! Yet they are insisting that ‘the way of the Lord is not just’” (Darr, on 33:1–20). Here, Ezekiel more closely repeats 18:25–30a.

33:17–20 18:25–30a

17And the members of your people will say, 25And you will say,

“The Lord’s path doesn’t measure.” “The Lord’s path doesn’t measure.”

Listen, will you, household of Israel.

Does my path not measure?

But those people, their path doesn’t measure. It’s your paths that don’t measure, isn’t it?

18When someone faithful 26When someone faithful

turns from his faithfulness turns from his faithfulness

and does wrong, . and does wrong and dies though them

he will die through them because of the wrong that he has done, he will die.

19But when someone faithless 27But when someone faithless

turns from his faithlessness turns from his faithlessness that he has done

and acts on a faithful ruling, and acts on a faithful ruling,

on the basis of those things that person will live. that person will keep himself alive.

28He saw and he turned

from all his rebellious deeds that he had done—

he will live—he will not die.

20And you say, 29And Israel’s household will say,

“The Lord’s path doesn’t measure.” “The Lord’s path doesn’t measure.”

Is it my paths that don’t measure, Israel’s household?

It’s your paths, it doesn’t measure, does it? 30Therefore

As an individual in accordance with his paths, as an individual, in accordance with his paths,

I will rule for you people, Israel’s household. I will rule for you people

The psychological stages people may go through when confronted with death are well known—shock, denial, bargaining, anger, and finally acceptance (Bowen, 208). Bowen (209) goes on:

To my knowledge there is no similar study that charts the psychological stages people go through when confronted with life. We are unaccustomed to acknowledging that it might be as difficult to accept a verdict of “life” as it is to accept “death.” Does not everyone want to hear good news? Verses 23–33 suggest that acceptance is neither the first nor the only stage. The exiles engage in a kind of bargaining, consisting of dictating the terms of when, where, and how life will happen. “You promised us this. Now is a good time. We are ready” (see v. 24). Instead of anger, indifference is the strongest emotion. The message is heard politely, maybe even with some initial enthusiasm. But when the good news fails to materialize as promised or when anticipated, indifference sets in and people revert to previous behavior (vv. 30-32). The news makes no qualitative difference to their lives. What does a message of return matter if you still live in exile? There are no stories recounting the prophet’s rejection in texts that focus exclusively on consolation (Isa 40–55; Ezek 34–48), but the sheer volume of material hints that they had to be as persistent in prophesying hope as in prophesying destruction. Just as there are reasons people may resist accepting judgment, there are many reasons people may resist proffered hope. One reason is depression, a common consequence of trauma. Anyone who has experienced depression, or knows a depressed person, understands how difficult it is to imagine that life can be better. Especially in times of despair and death, it is almost impossible to believe in God’s ability or willingness to save.

The failure of imagination—to imagine death or life—may be the greatest hindrance to acceptance. It is the prophet’s task to imagine one future or the other at the appropriate time.

### Biblical Theology Comments

Ezekiel again provokes reflection on theological tensions that cannot be resolved because they involve complex matters that need to be accepted in their depth and mystery, yet that can be disconcerting, can tempt people to focus on one side of the tension rather than the other, and can issue in disagreement between theologians. But “neither a message of the ‘unconditionally loving God’ nor a message of strict retributive divine justice can be faithful to scripture” (Jenson, 255). You can have life. But there must be turning (Zimmerli, 2:190). Calvin notes the questions raised by the fact that God doesn’t desire the death of a sinner (33:11), a text that featured in disputes over the relationship between divine sovereignty and human freewill.[[256]](#footnote-257) Greenhill (668) notes that God seemed enthusiastic about the death of Pharaoh and his army in the Red Sea, and critiqued Saul for being too merciful with the Amalekites.

And does responsibility attach to communities or to individuals? Modern Western thinkers may instinctively prefer to emphasize the freedom and responsibility of the individual, may not care for the idea that individuals share in responsibility for community decisions in which they did not personally take part, and may find support for this preference in Ezekiel’s description of individual responsibility. But Yahweh makes individual responsibility a model for understanding community responsibility rather than suggesting a tension between them. Individuals have responsibility for the decisions they take, but they cannot escape sharing in responsibility for the community’s decisions. And Ezekiel makes clear elsewhere (Ezek 16; 20; 21:3 [8]) that he accepts the way individuals share in the consequences of the community’s wrongdoing (Eichrodt, 237).

### Application and Devotional Implications

Ezekiel’s business “was first to lay down the conditions of entrance into the new kingdom of God, and then out of the ruins of the old Israel to make ready a people prepared for the Lord. Perhaps the nearest parallel to this department of his work which history affords is the mission of the Baptist. The keynote of Ezekiel's preaching was the same as that of John: ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand’” (Skinner, 300–1). James’s almost-closing declaration “Someone who turns a sinner from wandering on his path will save the sinner’s life from death” looks like a declaration more directly influenced by Ezek 33:9–12.[[257]](#footnote-258) And “within Christian circles there are many references by Church Fathers applying the role of σκοπός [lookout] and this passage to Christian teachers and priests,” especially 32:7. Clement of Rome in a letter to the Corinthian church assumed that as a minister he had such a responsibility, drawing the Corinthians’ attention to the fact that “the Lord of all himself spake concerning repentance with an oath. As I live, saith the Lord, I desire not the death of a sinner, as I desire his repentance” (33:11) (Olley, 462, 464). An example:

The prophetical gifts remain with us, even to the present time.… And just as there were false prophets contemporaneous with your holy prophets, so are there now many false teachers amongst us.… Therefore we are most anxious that you be persuaded not to be misled by such persons, since we know that every one who can speak the truth, and yet speaks it not, shall be judged by God, as God testified by Ezekiel, when He said, ‘I have made thee a watchman to the house of Judah. If the sinner sin, and thou warn him not, he himself shall die in his sin; but his blood will I require at thine hand. But if thou warn him, thou shalt be innocent.’ And on this account we are, through fear, very earnest in desiring to converse [with men] according to the Scriptures, but not from love of money, or of glory, or of pleasure.… Now, if you know certain amongst us to be of this sort, do not for their sakes blaspheme the Scriptures and Christ. (Justin, *Dialogue with Trypho*, 82)

So people who are called to office in state or church are lookouts: “They must have eyes in their heads,” they are “set to watch,” to see what is coming and announce it: see Isa 56:10; Matt 13:25 (Greenhill, 665). But (Hauerwas comments):

God's watchman can be tempted not to sound the warning. Moreover, if we fail to warn, then the very iniquity of those we are called to warn is ours. These are frightening words indeed.… Our task is to sound the horn that the world might be warned that its ways lead only to its own destruction.… The world does not believe that Jesus has in fact risen, making present a new age and thus transforming our lives. The world does not believe in a God that refuses to let our rejection of Jesus determine our relations to God and to one another. We must say to the world, as watchmen, that we see the sword and that all that is the world must turn from unbelief.… It is good news indeed, as we hear in Ezekiel, that God takes no pleasure in our death but, instead, calls us to life as his church, in order that the world might know there is an alternative to our violence.… Our task is to watch and blow the warnings, that we and the world might know God has redeemed us in Jesus Christ in a manner that nothing we do—even the destruction of the world—can remove. Let us praise God for that—even for being led time and time again to God's table of sacrifice where our loves are transformed, so that rather than being the source of violence our loves become the exemplification of God's peace. [[258]](#footnote-259)

### Selected Bibliography

Allison, Dalr, C. “A Liturgical Tradition behind the Ending of James.” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 34 (2011): 3–18.

Baxter, Richard. *A Call to the Unconverted, to Turn and Live; and Accept of Mercy, While Mercy May Be Had; As They Ever Would Find Mercy, in the Day of Extremity from the Living God* (1658). Reprinted Philadelphia: Carey, 1795.

Greenspoon, David. “The Prophet as Watcher.” *JBQ* 27 (1999): 29–35.

Hauerwas, Stanley. “Hating Mothers as the Way to Peace.” *Journal for Preachers* 11 (1988): 17–21.

Leene, Hendrik. “Blowing the Same Shofar: An Intertextual Comparison of Representations of the Prophetic Role in Jeremiah and Ezekiel.” In Johnnes de Moor, ed., *The Elusive Prophet: The Prophet as a Historical Person, Literary Character and Anonymous Artist*, 175–98. OtSt 45. Leiden: Brill, 2001.

Sweeney, Marvin A. “The Assertion of Divine Power in Ezekiel 33:21–39:29.” in Marvin A. Sweeney, *Form and Intertextuality in Prophetic and Apocalyptic Literature*, 156–72. FAT 45. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005.

van Rooy, Herrie F. “Esegiël 33 as Wentelpunt in die Boek van Esegiël.” *In die Skriflig* 46/1 (2012).

Yamada, Frank M. “Ezekiel 33:7–11.” *Lectionary Homiletics* 22/5 (2011): 38–39.

1. See Casey A. Strine, *Sworn Enemies: The Divine Oath, the Book of Ezekiel, and the Polemics of Exile*. (BZAW 436. Berlin: de Gruyter, 2013). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Q כְּתָב and K כתוב are alternative spellings. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. עֶצֶם הַיּוֹם, literally, “the self/substance of this day.” [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. סָמַךְ, literally “leant on/put pressure on.” [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. See 17:2. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. לָקוַֹח, inf. abs. functioning imperativally. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. For the verb דּוּר (a hapax\* except perhaps for Psa 84:10[11] where it must have a different meaning) EVV commonly have “pile,” but related words suggest “circle,” which makes sense here. Then תַּחַת usually means “under” but can mean “the bottom of,” which also makes sense here. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. רַתַּח רְתָחֶיהָ, literally, “prepare its prepared things” (see Kilchör, “בשל”). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. Like הוֺי (see 13:3), אוֹי can appear in the context of a rebuke and threat, and it expresses horror, but it does not mean “Woe” (so BDB, 222). Cf. LXX. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. חָלְאָה occurs only in 24:5–6, 11–12 and its meaning can only be guessed. חָלָא (which BDB treats as a separate root) means “be sick.” NRSV has “rust,” whose reddish color would fit the blood it symbolizes in the parable, but copper (24:11) does not rust. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
11. לׅנְתָחֶיהָ לׅנְתָחֶיהָ, literally, “by its pieces, by its pieces.” [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
12. מְדוּרָה, another near hapax (see the translation footnote on 24:5), which otherwise occurs only in Isa 30:33. *HALOT* sees it to mean a circular pile of wood. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
13. The rare verb דָּלַק suggests creating a fierce fire (BDB). [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
14. הַרְקַח הַמֶּרְקָחָה, literally, “mix the mixture pan.” It is the fourth successive colon beginning with a hiphil inf. *ha-*, though this fourth has a *waw* in front of it. As in English, the infinitives could continue the first person in 24:9b or could function imperativally (Zimmerli, 1:494–95). [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
15. This phrase also begins with *weha-* (“and the”), as does the next phrase, the first in 24:11, an inf. const. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
16. The hapax תְּאֻנּׅים may come from און II and mean vigor or from און I and mean “troubles” in the sense of “efforts,” or the clause might denote wearying *with* troublesome (wrongful) acts (cf. אָוֶן in 11:2). Tg. has “guile” (cf. KJV). [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
17. רַבַּת חֶלְאָתָהּ, literally, “the vastness of its scum.” [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
18. בְּטֻמְאׇתֵךְ זׅמׇּה, literally “in your defilement willfulness.” On the construction and on זׅמָּה, see the translation footnote on 16:27. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
19. While the *qatal\** טׅהַרְתּׅיךָ would usually imply “I cleansed,” the context marks that as too unequivocal a statement. It is an irreal or hypothetical *qatal* (see 18:10 and the translation footnote). [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
20. The jerky sequence of lines comprising 24:9–13 comes to a jerky conclusion as the subordinate phrase “with your defilement in its willfulness” and the subordinate clause “since I would have cleansed you, but you did not get clean from your defilement” are parallel preambles to the main clause beginning “You will not get clean again.” [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
21. The accent on the second syllable indicates that בָּאָה is a participle not a *qatal*. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
22. See also Gosse, “Temple.” [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
23. EVV have “turban,” which it quite likely was, but פְּאֵר is the only Heb. word for headgear. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
24. Traditionally, “sandals,” but likewise נְעָלׅים is the default term for footwear. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
25. Accompanying the parallelism\* in these phrases is an alliteration\* between מַחְמַד (object of delight) and מַחְמַל (object of pity). [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
26. It would be natural to take Yahweh as the “I” in this sentence, with the implication that “this picture of God’s intense grief at the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple is a stunning climax to Ezekiel’s litany of judgments on the ‘House of Israel’” (Gross, “Who Am I?” 327). [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
27. הַפָּלַיט, literally, “the survivor”—the one who concerns us (cf. GK 126r, JM 137n). [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
28. See Lust, “Delight.” [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
29. Lipton, “Early Mourning,” 198. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
30. Rossi, “Private Life,” 298–303. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
31. Lipton, “Early Mourning.” [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
32. Tuell, “Rehab,” 301. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
33. Lust, “Delight,” 10–15. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
34. McIntyre, “Bound,” 335. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
35. Langley, “Direction,” 145. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
36. Cook, “Suppression.” [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
37. Döhling, “Körper,” 271. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
38. Tiemeyer, “Compassion,” 191. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
39. Amzallag, “Revisiting.” [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
40. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, revised ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1979), 99 (cf. Blenkinsopp, 105). [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
41. See Lapsley, “Feeling.” [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
42. Lee, *Mapping*, 53. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
43. Geyer, “Mythology”; Geyer, *Mythology and Lament*; Schöpflin “Tyrosworte,” 209–10. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
44. Petter, *Ezekiel*, sees the city lament genre influencing Ezekiel as it does Lamentations. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
45. יַעַן followed by an inf./gerund is a distinctive expression in Ezekiel, occurring five times in this chapter. Its similarity to the verb עָנָה might mean it suggested “in response to.” [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
46. “Your/you” is f. sg. (the gender for a city) through 24:3b-5a, then m. sg. (commonly the gender for a people in light of the gender of its eponymous ancestor) through 24:6–7. Ammon is a corporate entity like Israel or Judah, though it is hardly ever referred to as “Ammon.” The First Testament almost invariably refers to “descendants of Ammon.” The difference between 24:2–5 and 6–7 may be one indication that 24:6–7 was originally a separate declaration. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
47. Rashi (in MG) derives נׅחָל from נָחַל rather than חָלַל, which would imply the translation “was acceded to.” There are no other instances of נָחַל niphal and in the context the derivation assumed by Qimchi (in MG) from חָלַל is more plausible (so also Tg., LXX, Vg.). But readers might infer a paronomasia,\* given the reference to land as a possession (מוֹרָשָׁה) in the next verse. See 7:24; 22:16. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
48. טׅירוֹת, more literally “rows.” [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
49. In the parallelism,\* the two parts of the expression “Rabbah of the Ammonites” (21:20 [25]) are divided between the two cola in the line. Koopmans (“Poetic Reciprocation”) also construes 25:12–17 as verse. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
50. אַשְׁמׅידְךָ forms a single-word colon that brings the threat to a conclusion with a decisive thump. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
51. “At” here three times renders מׅן: cf. *DCH* 5:338, 342, BDB, 578b. But Ezekiel might be being elliptical and implying “opening Moab’s flank [and removing protection] from the towns….” [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
52. Short for Bet-baՙal-meՙon (Josh 13:17). [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
53. The two opening phrases are extraposed\* and the *waw* is resumptive. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
54. The *wayyiqtol*\* וַיֶּאְשְׁמוּ is followed by the intensifying inf. abs. אָשׁוֹם, instead of following it (GK 113r; *IBHS* 35.3.1f). [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
55. As with “Ammon,” the First Testament hardly ever speaks of “Philistia” and rather refers to “the Philistines.” [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
56. Mayfield, “Literary Structure.” [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
57. Cf. Langley, “Vindication.” [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
58. Lee, “Hope or Judgment.” [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
59. See, e.g., Larry G. Herr, “The Ammonites in the Late Iron Age and Persian Period,” in Burton MacDonald and Randall W. Younker, ed., *Ancient Ammon* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 219–37. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
60. See Babylonian Chronicle 5 (Albert Kirk Grayson, *Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles* [Locust Valley, NY: Augustin, 1975], 100); also, e.g., Carl S. Ehrlich, “Philistia and the Philistines,” in Bill T. Arnold and Brent A. Strawn, ed., *The World around the Old Testament: The People and Places of the Ancient Near East* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2016), 353–77 (367–68). [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
61. Goering, “Proleptic Fulfillment,” 483. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
62. See, e.g., Saur, “Tyros,” 168–72; Saur, “Ezekiel 26–28”; contrast Kellenberger, “Heisse Atem,” in a socio-critical argument. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
63. See Renz, “Proclaiming”; Udd, “Prediction”; Ulrich, “Dissonant Prophecy”; and the Biblical Theology comments on 25:1–17. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
64. נׅשְׁבְּרָה is f. sg. and thus the city is its subject, and it is niphal and thus intransitive, with “the doors” standing in apposition. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
65. The preposition לְ functions as an object marker, an Aramaism. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
66. For עָפָר NIV has “rubble,” but see the translation footnote on 26:12. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
67. Ezekiel’s spells the name with ר rather than נ, as Jeremiah usually does. It is thus nearer to the Babylonian Nabû-kudurri-uṣur. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
68. That is, the destroyers will be wielding them as they attack. Vg. translates חֶרֶב “weapons” (cf. Exod 20:25). Most EVV have “axes,” which would be unparalleled. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
69. כּׅמְבוֹאֵי עׅיר מְבֻקָּעָה, literally “like the comings of a breached city.” [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
70. NIV again has “rubble” (cf. 26:4). Given the regular meaning of עָפָר as “dirt,” the reference will likely be to the remains of structures made of mud brick, which fits the collocation of stones, timber, and עָפָר in Lev 14:45 (Greenberg, 2:534). [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
71. LXX, Vg. take תּׅהְיֶה and תּׅבָּנֶה, “will be” and “will be rebuilt,” as second-person m., but Tyre was previously f. and תּׅהְיֶה was third-person f. in 26:5aα, which 26:14aβ repeats, with 26:14aγ as an unmarked relative clause. [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
72. בֵּהָרַג הֶרֶג, literally, “at the being killed [with] a killing” or “at the killing of the killing”: the verb is niphal inf. with elision of a ה (GK 51l). [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
73. אׅיּׅים (for which 26:18 has the Aramaic form אׅיּׅן) denotes something broader than “islands” (LXX, Vg.). [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
74. “Won’t they” (הֲלֹא) is the first word in the message, so that the two lines do work 3-2, 3-2. [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
75. Pl. חֲרָדוֹת matches the pl. coats and clothes: the tremblings are like replacement garments. [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
76. לׅרְגָעׅים, literally, “by moments” (BDB) and thus nervously. But *DCH* 7:418 lists homonyms\* of רֶגַע meaning “quiet,” “disquietude,” and “annihilation.” [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
77. The f. suffix on יוֹשְׁבֶיהָ suggests that the word refers to Tyre’s inhabitants, as in the previous colon, so that the colon refers to other people’s fear of the Tyrians. [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
78. אֶרֶץ תַּחְחּׅיּוֹת, literally “the country of low [things/places].” [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
79. Normally it is people who “abide” in a place; in this transferred meaning of יׇשַׁב qal, the place does the abiding (cf. 29:11; 35:9 K; 36:35), giving the qal a meaning equivalent to the niphal in 26:17, 19. [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
80. Sweeney, “Myth,” 137. [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
81. See Crouch, “Ezekiel’s Oracles.” [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
82. See, e.g., Chr. Brekelmans, “Sefire 1 A 29–30,” *VT* 13 (1963): 225–28. [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
83. J. Glen Taylor, “A First and Last Thing to do in Mourning: KTU 1.161 and Some Parallels,” in Lyle Eslinger and J. Glen Taylor, ed., *Ascribe to the Lord: Biblical and Other Essays in Memory of Peter C. Craigie*, JSOTSup 67 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1988), 151–77. [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
84. Ribeiro, “Descriando Tiro.” [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
85. Leonard-Fleckman, “Lamenting Tyre,”141. [↑](#footnote-ref-86)
86. On these and other terms in the chapter, see Diakonoff, “Naval Power.” [↑](#footnote-ref-87)
87. On Ezekiel’s verbal creativity, especially here, see Verman, “Ezekiel.” [↑](#footnote-ref-88)
88. See Corral, *Ezekiel’s Oracles*. [↑](#footnote-ref-89)
89. John Masefield, *The Collected Poems* (London: Heinemann, 1931), 56. [↑](#footnote-ref-90)
90. Newsom, “Maker of Metaphors,” 157. [↑](#footnote-ref-91)
91. Yang, “Metaphor.” [↑](#footnote-ref-92)
92. מְבוֹאֹת יָם, “sea entrances.” [↑](#footnote-ref-93)
93. Including the semantically unnecessary אַת puts an emphasis on “you.” [↑](#footnote-ref-94)
94. כְּלׅילַת יֹפׅי, literally “the completeness of handsomeness.” “Beauty” would fit the f. gender of the word for a ship and of Tyre as a city, but neither the ship nor the city are portrayed as female. [↑](#footnote-ref-95)
95. כָּלְלוּ יָפְיֵךְ, literally “they made your handsomeness complete.” [↑](#footnote-ref-96)
96. Dual לֻחֹתָיׅם suggests something with two parts, perhaps upper and lower decks. [↑](#footnote-ref-97)
97. EVV translate הָיָה “were” in 27:8–11, but it continues to refer to the origin of the ship/city (cf. “became” in 27:7). [↑](#footnote-ref-98)
98. A pilot was a חֹבֵל, a “roper,” a rope-puller, from חֶבֶל “rope.” [↑](#footnote-ref-99)
99. In the previous verse חֵילֵךְ meant “your force,” and LXX assumes this reference here. [↑](#footnote-ref-100)
100. LXX interprets Ezekiel as referring to Tyre’s resources, but the context suggests more likely a reference to Tarshish’s resources, which are spelled out in the next line. [↑](#footnote-ref-101)
101. Through the chapter, Ezekiel uses בְּ to mean “for” in the sense of “at the price/cost of” (BDB, 90a). [↑](#footnote-ref-102)
102. 27:12–24aα comprises verbal sentences in which the verb comes near the end (27:12, 13b, 14, 15, 16, 17b, 18–19a, 19b, 22b) and noun sentences marked by the copula הֵמָּה (“they”) which comes near the end (27:13a, 17a, 20–21a, 21b–22a, 23–24aα). To put it another way, the unit makes much use of extraposition.\* In 27:17a (the sentence about Judah and Israel!) the copula comes earlier. [↑](#footnote-ref-103)
103. For פָּרָשׁׅים NRSV has “warhorses,” but how they would be different from simple “horses” is not clear (Greenberg, 2:554). [↑](#footnote-ref-104)
104. Literally, “in your hand”; so also in 27:21. [↑](#footnote-ref-105)
105. A guess for פַּנַּג. [↑](#footnote-ref-106)
106. Dan is puzzling as the beginning of a verse in 27:19, but less puzzling if linked to 27:18 (see further the textual note). [↑](#footnote-ref-107)
107. I follow Vg.’s translation of the hapax\* חֹפֶשׁ as something like “rug.” LXX has “with choice beasts for chariots.” [↑](#footnote-ref-108)
108. מַכְלֻלׅים; cf. the words translated “ultimate(ly)” in 27:3, 4, 11, כְּלׅילָה and כָּלַל. [↑](#footnote-ref-109)
109. See *HALOT* and Greenberg, 2:560. [↑](#footnote-ref-110)
110. Vg. and LXXBderive דֻּמָה from דָּמַם “be silent,” though the form is odd. NRSV derives the word from דָּמָה which can produce the meaning “destroy.” But neither understanding fits well. For “fortress,” cf. *DCH* 2:449. [↑](#footnote-ref-111)
111. On MT’s punctuation with the maqqeph (hyphen) joining בְּמַעֲמַקֵּי and מַיׅם, the line’s unusual 3-1 rhythm emphasizes the one-stress colon. [↑](#footnote-ref-112)
112. Literally, “they stood on end as to their hair and they grimaced as to their faces.” [↑](#footnote-ref-113)
113. See Anna Rambiert-Kwaśniewska, “Problem of the Translation of Toponyms in the Septuagint Based on the Example of ‘Wool of Miletus,’” *Wrocławski* *Przegląd* *Teologiczny* 28/2 (2020): 31–48. [↑](#footnote-ref-114)
114. See Willis, “National ‘Beauty.’” [↑](#footnote-ref-115)
115. Strong, “Great King.” [↑](#footnote-ref-116)
116. Newsom, “Maker of Metaphors,” 157. [↑](#footnote-ref-117)
117. George B. Caird, *A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John the Divine* (London: Black, 1966), 227, quoted by Olley, 422. [↑](#footnote-ref-118)
118. Durlesser, “Sinking,” 91. [↑](#footnote-ref-119)
119. Vayntrub, “Tyre’s Glory,” 216 [↑](#footnote-ref-120)
120. Wilson, “Tyre,” 259, 260. [↑](#footnote-ref-121)
121. Also Sedlmeier, “Selbstvergottung.” [↑](#footnote-ref-122)
122. See further Nevader, “*Deus* *Non* *Creator*,” 59–61. [↑](#footnote-ref-123)
123. A double translation of וְְחִלְּלוּ, “make ordinary” and “slay” (cf. 28:9, and see the verse-by-verse commentary). [↑](#footnote-ref-124)
124. מְמוֹתֵי, literally “deaths”; similarly מוֹתֵי in 28:10. [↑](#footnote-ref-125)
125. LXX translates “in the delight of God’s garden” (cf. Jerome, 324). “Delight” (τρυφή) fits the likely etymology of עֵדֶן (see BDB). Garden” is then παράδεισος, which is also LXX’s term for a garden in a passage such as Gen 3:23, “garden of delight.” [↑](#footnote-ref-126)
126. A synecdoche,\* “every precious stone on your covering.” [↑](#footnote-ref-127)
127. The identification of some of these stones is uncertain (see Zimmerli, 2:82–84; Block, 2:106–9). [↑](#footnote-ref-128)
128. The usual meaning of תֻּפּׅים, “hand drums,” hardly fits here, but Aq., Theod., Vg. link the word with יֳפִי (28:12, 17; see *DCH* 8:662). [↑](#footnote-ref-129)
129. The meaning of the hapax\* נֶקֶב is again a matter of guesswork; the verb נָקַב means “pierce” (see *DCH* 5:747). [↑](#footnote-ref-130)
130. That is, in the covering, your clothing. [↑](#footnote-ref-131)
131. כְּרוּב מִמְשַׁח, literally “a griffin of anointing.” מִמְשַׁח is a hapax, but it is related to words for anointing such as מָשַׁח. Vg., Sym. Derive it from a homonym\* in later Heb. and Aramaic meaning “extension” (see *DTT*, 851; *HALOT*, 596; *DCH* 5:333–34). [↑](#footnote-ref-132)
132. The extraposed\* clause is followed by a *waw*-consecutive (see GK 112mm). [↑](#footnote-ref-133)
133. “You were תָּמִים”: LXX has blameless, which is appropriate except that it denotes the absence of something rather than the presence of something; Vg. has “perfectus,” which denotes the presence of something, and “perfect” would be an appropriate translation except that it could lead readers to think in terms of later theological categories. [↑](#footnote-ref-134)
134. אָבַד usually means “perish” and thus in the piel “kill,” but it can mean “lose,” intransitively in the qal and transitively in the piel (e.g., Jer 23:1), which fits better in this context. [↑](#footnote-ref-135)
135. The seventh occurrence of בְּ in eight cola—the others can all be translated “in.” [↑](#footnote-ref-136)
136. See Miller-Naudé and Naudé. “Textual Interrelationships.” [↑](#footnote-ref-137)
137. See, Barr, “Cherub”; Noort, “Gan-Eden”; Lee, “Tyrian King”; Patmore, “Masoretes”; Patmore, *Adam*. [↑](#footnote-ref-138)
138. See Arbel, “Questions.” [↑](#footnote-ref-139)
139. Nevader, “Yhwh and the Kings,” 163. [↑](#footnote-ref-140)
140. See Marvin H. Pope, *El in the Ugaritic Texts*, VTSup 2 (Leiden: Brill, 1955), 61–65, 97–99. [↑](#footnote-ref-141)
141. See Kang, “Rhetoric.” [↑](#footnote-ref-142)
142. Day (“Daniel”) finds hints of wisdom in the Aqhat story. [↑](#footnote-ref-143)
143. See Theocharous, “Wealth.” [↑](#footnote-ref-144)
144. Callender, *Adam*, 133. [↑](#footnote-ref-145)
145. Arbel, “Seal,” 128. See further Litwa, *Desiring Divinity*, 13–28. [↑](#footnote-ref-146)
146. Alice Wood, *Of Wings and Wheels: A Synthetic Study of the Biblical Cherubim* (BZAW 385; Berlin: De Gruyter, 2008), 71. [↑](#footnote-ref-147)
147. Callender, *Adam*, 87 (Callender is more inclined to think in terms of a mythic background). [↑](#footnote-ref-148)
148. Launderville, “Ezekiel's Cherub”; see further Lee, “(Divine) Cherub.” [↑](#footnote-ref-149)
149. Cook, “Creation Archetypes.” [↑](#footnote-ref-150)
150. See, e.g., Stordalen, *Echoes*, 332–408;Mihăilă, “Temple”; Tiemeyer, “Zechariah’s Spies.” [↑](#footnote-ref-151)
151. Callender, *Adam*, 120. [↑](#footnote-ref-152)
152. Theocharous, “Wealth,” 113. [↑](#footnote-ref-153)
153. Osborne, “Wisdom,” 121. [↑](#footnote-ref-154)
154. See Rom-Shiloni, “Ezekiel and Jeremiah,” 22–27. [↑](#footnote-ref-155)
155. John Acton, *Historical Texts and Studies* (London: Macmillan, 1907), 504. [↑](#footnote-ref-156)
156. See, e.g., Vercruysse, “Pères de l'Église.” [↑](#footnote-ref-157)
157. Gordon, “Gods Must Die.” [↑](#footnote-ref-158)
158. See Strom, “OT Background.” [↑](#footnote-ref-159)
159. Strong, “Seat of God.” [↑](#footnote-ref-160)
160. Aḥituv, “Ezekiel and Egypt,” 22. [↑](#footnote-ref-161)
161. Strine and Crouch, “Yhwh’s Battle,” 891–96, 902. [↑](#footnote-ref-162)
162. Van Rooy, “Ezekiel’s Prophecies against Egypt,” 120. [↑](#footnote-ref-163)
163. יְאֹרָיו, literally “its Niles,” since יְאֹר derives from the river’s name in Egyptian (“Nile” comes from its name in Greek). Henceforth I translate יְאֹרִים simply as “channels.” [↑](#footnote-ref-164)
164. עֲשִֹיתִנִי would usually mean “I made me”(cf. *CTAT*, 239–41) but here the suffix could have dative significance. [↑](#footnote-ref-165)
165. M. sg. “you” in 29:7 and 9 refers to Pharaoh. So also “you” in 29:10. [↑](#footnote-ref-166)
166. The *yiqtol*\* or *weqatal*\* verbs in 29:7 that refer to the past are frequentative. [↑](#footnote-ref-167)
167. The “you” is now f. sg., referring to the country. [↑](#footnote-ref-168)
168. See the translation footnote on 26:20. [↑](#footnote-ref-169)
169. I.e., “the biggest desolation among desolate countries” (JM 141j, note). [↑](#footnote-ref-170)
170. See the translation footnote on 2:6. [↑](#footnote-ref-171)
171. See the translation footnote on 16:53. Here the traditional translation “bring back the captivity” would work, though the contrast between the odd qal of שׁוּב and the hiphil in the next clause rather suggests a paronomasia.\* [↑](#footnote-ref-172)
172. See the translation footnote on 16:3. [↑](#footnote-ref-173)
173. The third person m. verb presumably presupposes that “he” is Pharaoh. [↑](#footnote-ref-174)
174. While אֲדׄנָי, “Lord,” frequent in Ezekiel in this compound name for God but also occurring elsewhere, might be honorific pl. like אֱלׄהִים, with a first person suffix, and thus signify “my Lord,” it alternatively might have an emphatic ending and thus signify “the Lord of all.” The fact that Yahweh speaks here supports the second understanding (see, e.g., *IBHS* 7.4.3ef; DG 21, note 5). [↑](#footnote-ref-175)
175. See further Guillaume, “Metamorphosis”; Yoder, “Ezekiel 29:3”; Crouch, “Ezekiel’s Oracles.” Marzouk (*Egypt as a Monster*) Egypt against the background of “monster theory.” [↑](#footnote-ref-176)
176. See Henri Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods: A Study of Ancient Near Eastern Religion as the Integration of Society & Nature* (Phoenix edition; Chicago: University of Chicago, 1978), 57–58 (cf. Greenberg, 2:612). [↑](#footnote-ref-177)
177. Boyd, “Mirror Images,” 221–23; see further, Marzouk, *Egypt as a Monster*; Kim, “Dragon.” [↑](#footnote-ref-178)
178. Cf. van Rooy, “Egypt in Exile,” 239–44. [↑](#footnote-ref-179)
179. Most of the Egypt messages include a date in an extraposed\* clause beginning with וַיְהִי, literally “and it happened” (29:17; 30:20; 31:1, 20; 32:1, 17). [↑](#footnote-ref-180)
180. For “horde” (הָמוֹן), modern EVV have “wealth,” but “horde” is the common meaning in Ezekiel, in particular in Ezek 29–32, where it is a key word in connection with Egypt (*HUB*). And for נָשָׄא meaning carry people off, cf. Isa 64:6 [5]; Dan 11:12. [↑](#footnote-ref-181)
181. I translate בְּ “in” each time in 30:4 (and in 30:8) to reflect the repetition at the end of the cola (cf. 28:22–23), even though in English “in” does not work as well every time. [↑](#footnote-ref-182)
182. In the neat abcc′b′a′ line, the second colon adds a personal suffix “his” and complements the niphal verb with a periphrastic\* verb suggesting “wasted they will remain” (cf. 44:1). [↑](#footnote-ref-183)
183. All three cola about Sin, No՚, and Noph are jerky or grammatically odd. The last colon links a construct to an adverb, literally “adversaries of by day” (DG, 35, remark 4). [↑](#footnote-ref-184)
184. See *תורה נביאים וכתובים* *Biblia Hebraica*, ed. Rudolf Kittel (Stuttgart: Württembergische Bibelanstalt, reprinted 1962). [↑](#footnote-ref-185)
185. Garstad, “Nebuchadnezzar’s Siege,” 175. [↑](#footnote-ref-186)
186. Henri Stierlin and Christiane Ziegler, *Tanis: Trésors des Pharaons* (Fribourg: Office du Livre, 1987), 10. [↑](#footnote-ref-187)
187. Kennedy, “Hebrew *pithôn* *peh.”* [↑](#footnote-ref-188)
188. See the translation footnote on 29:17. [↑](#footnote-ref-189)
189. Inf. with לְ features five times in 30:22 with varying meanings (JM 124o). [↑](#footnote-ref-190)
190. In front of the king of Babylon, that is. [↑](#footnote-ref-191)
191. See, e.g., Lee, *Mapping*,135–39. [↑](#footnote-ref-192)
192. Geyer, *Mythology*, 58. [↑](#footnote-ref-193)
193. See classically, Geo Widengren, *The King and the Tree of Life in Ancient Near Eastern Religion* (Uppsala: Almqvist, 1951); Mircea Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, trans. Rosemary Sheed (London: Sheed and Ward, 1958); more recently, Geyer, *Mythology*, 57–74. [↑](#footnote-ref-194)
194. See the translation footnote on 29:17. [↑](#footnote-ref-195)
195. *Qatal* דָּמִיתָ is stative (so also 31:18) (DG 57 remark 1). [↑](#footnote-ref-196)
196. The “its” through 31:4b is f., referring back to תְּהוׄם [↑](#footnote-ref-197)
197. הׄלֵךְ is hiphil inf. abs. from הָלַךְ as if it were יָלַךְ (see BDB, 236b, GK, 523; cf. Block, 2:182). [↑](#footnote-ref-198)
198. בּשַׁלְּחוׄ, literally “in its sending off.” [↑](#footnote-ref-199)
199. “Person and tense vacillate disconcertingly” in 31:10–12 (Greenberg, 2:639. [↑](#footnote-ref-200)
200. In the *waw*-apodosis\* clause, וְאֶתְּנֵהוּ, “then I would put it,” *yiqtol*\* following simple *waw*, indicates Yahweh’s decision about what he would do. [↑](#footnote-ref-201)
201. עָשֹוֹ יַעֲשֶֹה, “he would definitely act,” is a *yiqtol* describing the result Yahweh intended should follow. [↑](#footnote-ref-202)
202. Literally, “his arm” (cf. 30:21–25). [↑](#footnote-ref-203)
203. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1980). [↑](#footnote-ref-204)
204. Boadt, *Oracles*, 94. [↑](#footnote-ref-205)
205. Neibuhr, “Nemesis,” 68–69 (cf. Odell, 396). [↑](#footnote-ref-206)
206. See the translation footnote on 29:17. [↑](#footnote-ref-207)
207. See the translation footnote on 19:2. [↑](#footnote-ref-208)
208. דָּמָה I means “resemble,” דָּמָה II “destroy.” Other First Testament occurrences of the niphal derive from דָּמָה II, but here that understanding does not cohere as well with the next colon beginning וְ (“but” or “and”) and the parallel-looking verbal expression, implying that this verb is דָּמָה I (cf. *DTT* 313). [↑](#footnote-ref-209)
209. Literally “their”; the suffix refers back to מַיִם “water,” which is pl. in Heb. The usage recurs in 32:13. [↑](#footnote-ref-210)
210. Deriving the hapax\* רָמוּת from רָמַם II (cf. Vg.). KJV “height” derives it from רָמַם I or רוּם. [↑](#footnote-ref-211)
211. In the five-stress colon\*, I take מִִדָּמְךָ (“from your blood”) as an addition elucidating the hapax צָפָתְךָ “[with] your flow” (cf. Greenberg, 2:652–53). [↑](#footnote-ref-212)
212. See the translation footnote on 26:16. [↑](#footnote-ref-213)
213. The colon thus has a pl. subject and a sg. verb. [↑](#footnote-ref-214)
214. See the translation footnotes. [↑](#footnote-ref-215)
215. See Stökl, “Netting Marduk. [↑](#footnote-ref-216)
216. See further John Goldingay, *Daniel*, Word Biblical Commentary, revised edition (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2019). [↑](#footnote-ref-217)
217. Cf. Odell, 407 (though she says with Assyria). [↑](#footnote-ref-218)
218. See further Block, “Beyond.” [↑](#footnote-ref-219)
219. Zimmerli (2:169–71) offers an attempt, while Brock (2:222–23) has charts of the recurrences and Häner (348–53) plots their significance (especially the verbs “fall” and “go down”) in the context of Ezek 25–32 as a whole. [↑](#footnote-ref-220)
220. See Lust, “Rekenaar”; Lust, “Divergences.” [↑](#footnote-ref-221)
221. See the translation footnote on 29:17. [↑](#footnote-ref-222)
222. וְהוֹרִדֵהוּ אוׄתָהּ: thus the first “it” is m., referring to the horde (or to Pharaoh?—the same possibilities apply to the “you” and the “it” in 32:19 and 21). The second “it” is f., referring to Egypt, countries being f.—the same applies in 32:20. These are first illustrations of the switching noted in the section outline above. [↑](#footnote-ref-223)
223. If the “women” (בְּנוׄת, literally daughters) are going down to Sheol with the horde, they might simply be the other nations (cf. the expression “daughter [of] Babel”), though there is no parallel for this general expression having that reference. [↑](#footnote-ref-224)
224. “You” is m. sg. and presumably refers to the horde (or Pharaoh?—see the translation footnote on 32:18). [↑](#footnote-ref-225)
225. Tg. understands the clause as meaning “[to] the sword it [i.e., the horde] has been given” (cf. *CTAT*, 262–64), but syntactically this requires more inference and it ignores earlier references to giving the sword (see the verse-by-verse commentary). [↑](#footnote-ref-226)
226. Here the impv. מָשְׁכוּ is pl. (on the form, see GK 46d—CEB takes the word as *qatal\**). [↑](#footnote-ref-227)
227. The bed. [↑](#footnote-ref-228)
228. There being no “and,” the two peoples are apparently treated as one—cf. the sg. pronouns that follow. [↑](#footnote-ref-229)
229. The *yiqtol*\* יִשְׁכְּבוּand the further *yiqtol* יׅשְׁכָּבוּ in 32:29 contrast with the *qatals* in the context, but they appear among past descriptions of the peoples’ fate and they do not refer to a future event. [↑](#footnote-ref-230)
230. In the expression וַתְּהִי עֲוׄנׄתָם the verb is sg. and the noun pl., but the expression more likely reflects that occasional disparity than suggesting that the pl. noun is abstract or intensive (“great waywardness”). [↑](#footnote-ref-231)
231. See the translation footnote on 2:6. [↑](#footnote-ref-232)
232. The “you” is sg. [↑](#footnote-ref-233)
233. וְתִשְׁכַּב: the simple *waw* construction links the two verbs as aspects of the same event. [↑](#footnote-ref-234)
234. See the translation footnote on 2:6. [↑](#footnote-ref-235)
235. Daniel David Luckenbill, *The Annals of Sennacherib* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1924), 23, 27 (cf. Lind, 257, 258). [↑](#footnote-ref-236)
236. Wells and Hays, “Gradations.” [↑](#footnote-ref-237)
237. Doak, “Topography,” 617–18. [↑](#footnote-ref-238)
238. Davis, “Pharaoh.” [↑](#footnote-ref-239)
239. Burns, “Consolation,” 124. [↑](#footnote-ref-240)
240. Strong, “Egypt's Shameful Death.” [↑](#footnote-ref-241)
241. Doak, “Ezekiel’s Topography,” 610. [↑](#footnote-ref-242)
242. Metropolitan Anthony of Sourozh (Anthony Bloom), “Preparation for Death,” in George Every and others, ed., *Seasons of the Spirit* (London: SPCK, 1984), 42; reprinted from *Sobornost* 1/2 (1979). [↑](#footnote-ref-243)
243. See further Sweeney, “Assertion.” [↑](#footnote-ref-244)
244. Van Rooy, “Wentelpunt.” [↑](#footnote-ref-245)
245. See the translation comment on 3:11. [↑](#footnote-ref-246)
246. Block (2:249–51) lays them out synoptically. [↑](#footnote-ref-247)
247. See 7:27. [↑](#footnote-ref-248)
248. An irreal or hypothetical *qatal\** (cf. 33:9; see 18:10 and the translation footnote). [↑](#footnote-ref-249)
249. The *weqatal* verbs in 33:7–9 are equivalent to a *yiqtol*\* that is equivalent to an English imperfect. [↑](#footnote-ref-250)
250. On “I am alive” and the if-clause that leaves the implication unstated, see 5:11. [↑](#footnote-ref-251)
251. A hendiadys:\* literally, “a ruling and faithfulness.” [↑](#footnote-ref-252)
252. That is, the turning and the committing (Greenberg, 2:674–75). [↑](#footnote-ref-253)
253. See further Greenspoon, “Prophet as Watcher”; Leene, “Same Shofar.” [↑](#footnote-ref-254)
254. Baxter, *Call*,56. [↑](#footnote-ref-255)
255. Yamada, “Ezekiel, 38. [↑](#footnote-ref-256)
256. See John Calvin *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (reprinted Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), Book Three, 24:15; and further, Beckwith, 160–63. [↑](#footnote-ref-257)
257. Allison, “Liturgical Tradition,” 12. [↑](#footnote-ref-258)
258. Hauerwas, “Hating Mothers,” 21. [↑](#footnote-ref-259)