

# Prophecy of Egypt's Destruction and a Warning for Israel

Archaeology and historical records reveal that Egypt was once a very powerful and magnificent nation. According to archaeological records, the first dynasty of Egypt ruled from about 2920 B.C. to 2770. The first pharaoh of this dynasty was Menes. The archaeological discoveries in Egypt are fabulous. Currently, eighty different pyramids such as the great temple of Ramesses II, the sarcophagus of the Pharaoh Seti from the 19th Dynasty, and the Pyramid of Khufu known as the Great Pyramid have been discovered. Egypt made great advances in science, medicine, warfare, mathematics, astronomy, and the development of tools.

Even though Egypt was a magnificent empire, it was a wicked empire. They were polytheistic and greatly involved in the occult. Their main god was Osiris, the god of the underworld. The most important goddess was Isis, the wife of Osiris. Re was the sun god. Horus was the war god. These are just a few of the many gods and goddesses of Egypt.

An Egyptian priest known as Manetho in about 300 B.C. wrote a history of Egypt in the Greek language. The only remains of his work are quotes by Eusebius of Caesarea, Flavius Josephus, Julius Africanus, and George Syncellus. The reason I mention Manetho is

that his writings reveal the Egyptians were antisemitic despite the fact that Joseph, son of Jacob, rescued the nation of Egypt

from famine.

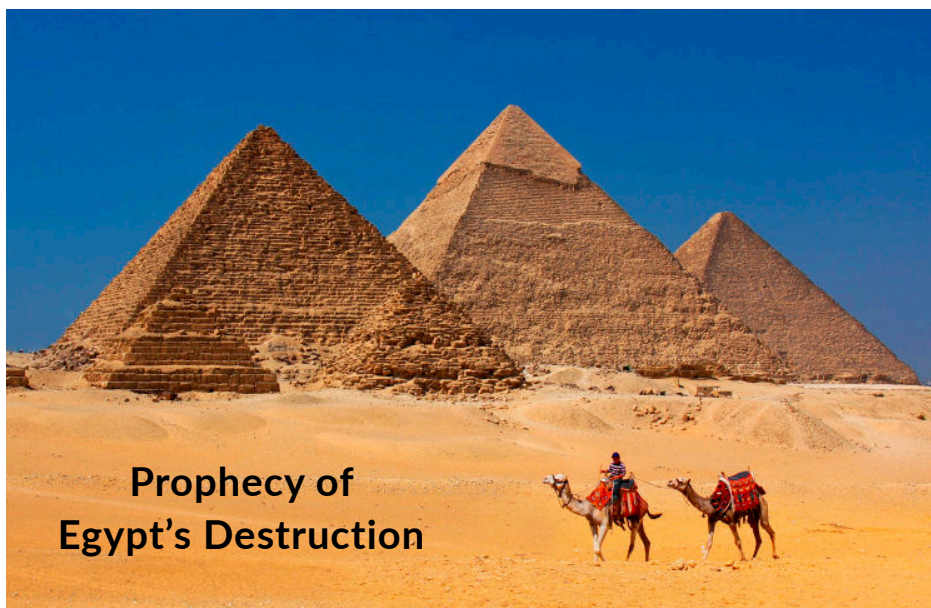
Because of Joseph's rule in Egypt, the Jews were once well respected there, but Scripture teaches that for about 400 years, the Israelites were slaves to the Egyptians. We have already discovered from Ezekiel 20:5-8, Joshua 24:14, and Amos 5:25-27 that the Israelites worshiped the Egyptian deities while they were in Egypt. So, even though Israel worshiped their gods and goddesses and were their slaves, the Egyptians hated them.

After the Israelites escaped from Egypt by crossing the Red Sea, historical records indicate that the two nations were normally enemies. Charles Feinberg in his commentary on Ezekiel states,

After the time of Joseph in the patriarchal period, Egypt was a constant enemy of Israel except for a short time in Solomon's reign. Egypt periodically urged Israel to rebel against Assyria and Babylon. In Ezekiel's time, as in Isaiah's day, there was a

conflict for power in Asia between the empires on the Nile and the Euphrates (cf. II Kings 18:21; Isa. 20:5; Jer. 37:5-10), and Judah became embroiled in the contest.<sup>1</sup>

Judah was in the middle between the empires of Egypt, Assyria and Babylon. Egypt wanted Judah to



<sup>1</sup> Charles Feinberg, *The Prophecy of Ezekiel*. Moody Press. 1969. P. 167.

join together to defend themselves against these super-powers.

**INTRODUCTION TO EZEKIEL 29.** Our study is in Ezekiel 29. Chapters 2-24 are prophecies about Yahweh's judgment upon Judah, the southern kingdom of Israel. Chapters 25-32 are prophecies about Yahweh's judgment upon seven surrounding Gentile nations. Six of those nations are Ammon, Moab, Edom, Philistia, Tyre, and Sidon in Ezekiel 25-28. Now we are going to learn about Yahweh's judgment on Egypt in seven prophecies in chapters 29-32.

Ezekiel 29 is the first prophecy against the nation of Egypt in chapters 29-32. We have already discovered that just as Yahweh prophesied punishment upon Judah because it rebelled and sinned against Him, God judged these seven sinning nations. Egypt is the last of the seven nations.

Here are verses 1-2,

*In the tenth year, in the tenth month, on the twelfth of the month, the word of the LORD came to me saying, Son of man, set your face against Pharaoh king of Egypt and prophesy against him and against all Egypt. Ezekiel 29:1-2 (NASB)*

Once again the prophet dates the prophecy. All of the dates given have been relative to the first year of King Jehoiachin's exile. Since the king was taken into exile in the city of Babylon in 597 B.C., that means the year of this prophecy is 587 B.C. If we compare this date to that given in Ezekiel 24:1 and 2 Kings 25:1, we learn this prophecy was given one year and two days after King Nebuchadnezzar attacked Jerusalem. It is also seven months before the city and temple are burned and leveled to the ground (2 Kings 25:3-8).

Verse 2 says the prophecy was against the Pharaoh, king of Egypt. So, as King Nebuchadnezzar's army was attacking Jerusalem this prophecy was announced against Egypt. If you are asking why this prophecy was given, we will discover the answer later.

Before we read verse 3, we need to know that the pharaoh mentioned in this verse is Pharaoh Hophra. He reigned as pharaoh from 588 BC to 570 BC. That means he became pharaoh about one year before Nebuchadnezzar's army attacked Jerusalem. We should also remember that Zedekiah, the king of Jerusalem, wanted to have an alliance with this pharaoh.

Why? Because Zedekiah had rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar and was afraid he would be killed. This is the king who was forced to see his sons killed by King Nebuchadnezzar, had his eyes plucked out, and was taken captive to Babylon. Apparently, Zedekiah in desperation for an alliance asked Pharaoh Hophra for one and hoped this new king could be trusted. But he made a great mistake. We discovered this in our study of "Parable of Two Great Eagles and The Vine" in Ezekiel 17:11-17. The prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah had warned him to not trust Pharaoh Hophra (Isaiah 30:1-2; Jeremiah 37:7).

It is helpful to know that Pharaoh Hophra was the son of Pharaoh Necho and was known as Pharaoh Apries to the historian Herodotus and many historians today.

**PROPHECY GIVEN AGAINST EGYPT (v 3-7).** Ezekiel 29 contains two of the seven prophecies against Egypt. We will study only the first prophecy. It has three sections. The first section is verses 3-7. I titled this section, "Prophecy Given Against Egypt." Here is verse 3,

*"Speak and say, 'Thus says the Lord GOD, 'Behold, I am against you, Pharaoh king of Egypt, The great monster that lies in the midst of his rivers, That has said, 'My Nile is mine, and I myself have made it.'"*  
Ezekiel 29:3 (NASB)

We are told immediately that the prophecy is against the Pharaoh of Egypt, Pharaoh Hophra. The prophecy is given in allegory. The pharaoh is symbolized by a great monster in the Nile River. The important river in Egypt is the Nile River. But notice that at the end of verse 3, we are told he was a very proud man. He believed he had made the Nile River himself. Herodotus states that this pharaoh believed no god could remove him because he was "so entrenched in his realm."<sup>2</sup> This further proves the pharaoh was very proud. But he was wrong!

So, in verses 4-5 Yahweh added,

*I will put hooks in your jaws  
And make the fish of your rivers cling to your scales.  
And I will bring you up out of the midst of your rivers,  
And all the fish of your rivers will cling to your scales.*

<sup>2</sup> Fienberg, Ibid., p. 168.

I will abandon you to the wilderness, you and all the fish of your rivers;  
You will fall on the open field; you will not be brought together or gathered.  
I have given you for food to the beasts of the earth and to the birds of the sky.  
Ezekiel 29:4-5 (NASB)

Yahweh's message was that He could and would remove him when He said, "I will put hooks in your jaws." Hooks were a common method used in capturing crocodiles. So, Yahweh would remove proud Pharaoh Hophra.

Yahweh would also remove the "fish of your rivers." The fish symbolized here were the people of Egypt. In verse 5, we are told they would die in the open field. Fish cannot live when they are out of water. Even worse, the beasts and birds would eat them. This is another allegorical or symbolic statement. But it is not difficult to understand. Since the pharaoh was the king of Egypt and the people were loyal to him, they would be punished along with him too!

So, Yahweh was going to remove Pharaoh Hophra as the leader of Egypt because he was a proud man. He and the people were going to be punished for their pride. This is the first reason Egypt would be punished.

Verses 6-7 now reveal another reason Egypt would be punished.

"Then all the inhabitants of Egypt will know that I am the LORD,  
Because they have been only a staff made of reed to the house of Israel.  
"When they took hold of you with the hand,  
You broke and tore all their hands;  
And when they leaned on you,  
You broke and made all their loins quake."  
Ezekiel 29:6-7 (NASB)

The second reason pharaoh would be punished is that the Egyptians were nothing but a staff made of reeds to Israel. Notice that Yahweh is using language they would have understood. The reeds probably grew in the Nile River. But the point is that a staff made of reeds would be very weak and useless. It Prophecy of Egypt's Destruction and a Warning for Israel

would not support a feeble person who was leaning on the staff. Yahweh's point is that Egypt did not support Israel. Egypt was not trustworthy. Israel should have trusted Yahweh.

In verse 7 Yahweh said, "When they took hold of you with the hand, you abandoned them. You broke their hands when they leaned on you." That is, when the king of Israel leaned on this flimsy and sharp staff it hurt his hands. Pharaoh Hophra did not support Israel in their battle against King Nebuchadnezzar's army after promising to help them. Ezekiel 17:15-17 describes what happened when King Nebuchadnezzar came to Jerusalem.

"But he [King Zedekiah] rebelled against him [Nebuchadnezzar] by sending his envoys to Egypt that they might give him horses and many troops. Will he succeed? Will he who does such things escape? Can he indeed break the covenant and escape? As I live,' declares the Lord GOD, 'Surely in the country of the king who put him on the throne, whose oath he despised and whose covenant he broke, in Babylon he shall die. Pharaoh with his mighty army and great company will not help him in the war, when they cast up ramps and build siege walls to cut off many lives.'" Ezekiel 17:15-17 (NASB)

So, we have our three principles in this study. The first principle is that God punishes proud leaders of nations, and nations that do not honor Him but claim the credit for the things that God has helped them accomplish. Psalm 127:1 tells us that God is the one accomplishes our tasks.

Unless the LORD builds the house,  
They labor in vain who build it;  
Unless the LORD guards the city,  
The watchman keeps awake in vain.  
Psalm 127:1 (NASB)

The second principle is that God will punish those who promise to support Israel and then withdraw their support. They have violated Genesis 12:3. They offer to bless Israel and then actually curse Israel. Remember the Hebrew word for "curse" means "to dishonor" or "to despise." A. C. Gaebelin makes an important comment in his 1921 commentary on the book of Ezekiel. It is a comment that is a warning to Israel. He

said,

Egypt gave no help to Israel and only wounded them grievously, as a staff which breaks under weight of him who leaneth upon it breaks and pierces the hand. Whenever God's people turn to Egypt (the type of the world) for help, and form ungodly alliances, they do so to their own hurt and shame.<sup>3</sup>

This is a warning to Israel to not trust Egypt. It is a warning to every nation to keep their promises to Israel. 2 Corinthians 6:14 gives all believers a general warning to not be unequally yoked with unbelievers.

The third principle is that once again in verse 6, God did this so that "all the inhabitants of Egypt will know that I am the LORD." God gives prophecies so that we will know He is the only God. We are going to see this principle three times in this study, and four times in the chapter (v. 6, 9, 16, 21). In fact, it occurs 63 times in the book of Ezekiel. He wants to help us know that He is the only God. Isaiah 43:10b says,

**And understand that I am He.**

**Before Me there was no God formed,**

**And there will be none after Me.**

**Isaiah 43:10b (NASB)**

**PROPHECY INTERPRETED (v 8-16).** The next section is verses 8-16 and it is titled, "Prophecy Interpreted." This section now explains the meaning of the prophecy in more detail.

**Therefore thus says the Lord GOD, "Behold, I will bring upon you a sword and I will cut off from you man and beast. The land of Egypt will become a desolation and waste. Then they will know that I am the LORD." Ezekiel 29:8-9a (NASB)**

Yahweh told the Egyptians that the allegorical prophecy in verses 3-7 meant they would be made a desolate wasteland or completely destroyed. When that occurred they would know that He is the LORD. That is the second time this promise is given.

Verses 9b-12 now gives us another principle.



**"Because you said, 'The Nile is mine, and I have made it,' therefore, behold, I am against you and against your rivers, and I will make the land of Egypt an utter waste and desolation, from Migdol to Syene and even to the border of Ethiopia. A man's foot will not pass through it, and the foot of a beast will not pass through it, and it will not be inhabited for forty years. So I will make the land of Egypt a desolation in the midst of desolated lands. And her cities, in the midst of cities that are laid waste, will be desolate forty years; and I will scatter the Egyptians among the nations and disperse them among the lands." Ezekiel 29:9b-12 (NASB)**

<sup>3</sup> A. C. Gaebelin. Publication Office "Our Hope". 1921. p. 305.  
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The city of Migdol is located on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. It was in the northern part of Egypt, in the Delta region. The city of Syene was in the southern part of Egypt at the first cataract on the Nile River. So, when Yahweh said Egypt would be an utter waste and desolation, from Migdol to Syene, this helps us understand that Yahweh's message was that all of Egypt would be waste and desolate. When Yahweh punishes a nation, He renders just punishment!

This reminds us of a fourth principle that we have already discovered seven times in Ezekiel. That is, one form of punishment that God uses against a nation is to scatter its citizens. He did that at the tower of Babel in Genesis 11:1-9. Yahweh will use it against the Egyptians. They were to be scattered for forty years.

A fifth principle that we have discovered earlier is that Yahweh uses more wicked nations to punish less wicked nations. So, Yahweh will use the Babylonian empire to punish Egypt. We will discover more about this in verses 17-21.

Verses 13-16 now tells us what would happen to the Egyptians after they were scattered for forty years.

**For thus says the Lord GOD, "At the end of forty years I will gather the Egyptians from the peoples among whom they were scattered. I will turn the fortunes of Egypt and make them return to the land of Pathros, to the land of their origin, and there they will be a lowly kingdom. It will be the lowest of the kingdoms, and it will never again lift itself up above the nations. And I will make them so small that they will not rule over the nations. And it will never again be the confidence of the house of Israel, bringing to mind the iniquity of their having turned to Egypt. Then they will know that I am the Lord GOD."'" Ezekiel 17:13-16 (NASB)**

Next Yahweh announced that He would gather back to Egypt those Egyptians He had scattered. He did not just permit or allow them to return. No, He intentionally gathered them back Himself. But the ancient empire of Egypt would not be restored to its former glory. Instead, He would humble the nation.

They would return to the land of Pathros. This area of land was apparently located in the southern part of Egypt near Syene. Therefore, Yahweh promised that He would gather the Prophecy of Egypt's Destruction and a Warning for Israel

Egyptians back to the southern part of Egypt, and from there the nation would expand. But the nation would never return to its former greatness. He would not allow it. Thus they would know that He is the Lord GOD.

Before we leave this passage it is important to state that,

No archeological finding has yet confirmed an Egyptian deportation similar to the one experienced by Israel. However, it is unwise to dismiss a clear statement of Scripture on the basis of incomplete archeological data. Nebuchadnezzar did attack Egypt (29:17-21; cf. Jer. 43:8-13; 46:1-25). Assuming that he conquered the country, one would expect him to deport people to Babylon as he did others he conquered. Presumably, then, the Egyptian captives would have been allowed to return home in the reign of Cyrus of Persia, who defeated Babylon in 539 B.C. (ca. 33 years after Nebuchadnezzar's attack). Allowing seven additional years for the people to return and rebuild, a 40-year period of desolation was entirely possible.<sup>4</sup>

Daniel 11:40-45 tells us that in the future at the Battle of Armageddon, Egypt will attempt to defeat Israel again, but Israel will not be defeated. That will be Egypt's last attempt to regain greatness.

**CONCLUSION.** We have discovered five biblical principles in this study. But the primary message of this prophecy is that Israel trusted in man and not in God. As a result, Israel suffered punishment, and Egypt suffered punishment for abandoning her. This reminds me of Psalm 118:8 which says,

**It is better to take refuge in the LORD  
Than to trust in man.  
It is better to take refuge in the LORD  
Than to trust in princes.  
Psalm 118:8 (NASB)**

Micah 7:5-7 says,

**Do not trust in a neighbor;  
Do not have confidence in a friend.  
From her who lies in your bosom**

<sup>4</sup> Charles H. Dyer. Ezekiel. The Bible Knowledge Commentary. ChariotVictor Publishing, 1985. p. 1286.

Guard your lips.  
For son treats father contemptuously,  
Daughter rises up against her mother,  
Daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law;  
A man's enemies are the men of his own household.  
But as for me, I will watch expectantly for the LORD;  
I will wait for the God of my salvation.  
My God will hear me.  
Micah 7:5-7 (NASB)

He said do not place your trust in a neighbor. Do not trust in a friend. Do not place your trust in the one who leans against your chest. He says do not trust in family members. Then he says I will wait for the God of my salvation. My God will hear me. That is, he says to trust in the Lord.

We often do the same thing that Israel did. We often trust those who are successful in the eyes of the world. We trust in pastors, We trust in church leaders. We trust many businesses, and at times even our governments. We trust family members and even our spouses. Sometimes they prove they cannot be trusted. But only God has demonstrated that He is always and totally faithful!

The song "Trust and Obey" tells us that there is no better way to be happy in Jesus than to trust and follow Him. The song "Christ The Sure and Steady Anchor" reminds us that Jesus is our anchor. He is always a safe and secure friend.

Finally, the recurring message in Ezekiel and in this chapter is that God wants to help us understand that He and He alone is God and there is no other. That is, we should choose to always place our trust in Him and in no one else!