Ezekiel 31

The Fallen Cedar: Pride Brings Down the Tallest Tree

OBSERVATION · INTERPRETATION · APPLICATION

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

CHAPTER THEME

God tells Pharaoh to look at Assyria — the tallest tree in the forest, fed by deep waters, sheltering the nations — and then look at the stump. God made it great; pride brought it down. Egypt is no taller than Assyria was, and it will fall the same way. Height is a gift from God, never a fortress against Him.

Ed Smith · Started 20 October 2026

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00 The Text

EZEKIEL 31 (KJV), MARKED

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

1 And it came to pass in the eleventh year, in the third month, in the first day of the month, that the word of the LORD came unto me, saying,

2 Son of man, speak unto Pharaoh king of Egypt, and to his multitude; Whom art thou like in thy greatness?

3 Behold, the Assyrian was a cedar in Lebanon with fair branches, and with a shadowing shroud, and of an high stature; and his top was among the thick boughs.

4 The waters made him great, the deep set him up on high with her rivers running round about his plants, and sent out her little rivers unto all the trees of the field.

5 Therefore his height was exalted above all the trees of the field, and his boughs were multiplied, and his branches became long because of the multitude of waters, when he shot forth.

6 All the fowls of heaven made their nests in his boughs, and under his branches did all the beasts of the field bring forth their young, and under his shadow dwelt all great nations.

7 Thus was he fair in his greatness, in the length of his branches: for his root was by great waters.

8 The cedars in the garden of God could not hide him: the fir trees were not like his boughs, and the chesnut trees were not like his branches; nor any tree in the garden of God was like unto him in his beauty.

9 I have made him fair by the multitude of his branches: so that all the trees of Eden, that were in the garden of God, envied him.

10 Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD; Because thou hast lifted up thyself in height, and he hath shot up his top among the thick boughs, and his heart is lifted up in his height;

11 I have therefore delivered him into the hand of the mighty one of the heathen; he shall surely deal with him: I have driven him out for his wickedness.

12 And strangers, the terrible of the nations, have cut him off, and have left him: upon the mountains and in all the valleys his branches are fallen, and his boughs are broken by all the rivers of the land; and all the people of the earth are gone down from his shadow, and have left him.

13 Upon his ruin shall all the fowls of the heaven remain, and all the beasts of the field shall be upon his branches:

14 To the end that none of all the trees by the waters exalt themselves for their height, neither shoot up their top among the thick boughs, neither their trees stand up in their height, all that drink water: for they are all delivered unto death, to the nether parts of the earth, in the midst of the children of men, with them that go down to the pit.

15 Thus saith the Lord GOD; In the day when he went down to the grave I caused a mourning: I covered the deep for him, and I restrained the floods thereof, and the great waters were stayed: and I caused Lebanon to mourn for him, and all the trees of the field fainted for him.

16 ▲ I made the nations to shake at the sound of his fall, when I cast him down to hell with them that descend into the pit: and all the ⇄ trees of Eden, the choice and best of Lebanon, all that drink water, shall be comforted in the nether parts of the earth.

17 They also went down into hell with him unto them that be slain with the sword; and they that were his arm, that dwelt under his ⇄ shadow in the midst of the heathen.

18 To whom art thou thus like in glory and in greatness among the ⇄ trees of Eden? yet shalt thou be brought down with the ⇄ trees of Eden unto the nether parts of the earth: ⚠ thou shalt lie in the midst of the uncircumcised with them that be slain by the sword. ◷ This is Pharaoh and all his multitude, saith the Lord GOD.

Marked in the text

- **v1** ◷ in the eleventh year, in the third month
- **v1** ▲ the word of the LORD came unto me
- **v2** ⇄ Whom art thou like in thy greatness
- **v3** ◷ the Assyrian was a cedar in Lebanon
- **v3** ⇄ shadow *(every occurrence)*
- **v4** ★ The waters made him great
- **v7** ★ his root was by great waters
- **v8** ⇄ garden of God *(every occurrence)*
- **v9** ▲ I have made him fair
- **v9** ⇄ trees of Eden *(every occurrence)*
- **v9** ⚠ envied him
- **v10** ⚠ his heart is lifted up in his height
- **v11** ▲ I have therefore delivered him into the hand of the mighty one of the heathen
- **v11** ▲ I have driven him out for his wickedness
- **v12** ⚠ strangers, the terrible of the nations, have cut him off
- **v14** ▮▮ To the end that none of all the trees by the waters exalt themselves for their height
- **v14** ⚠ they are all delivered unto death
- **v14** ◷ them that go down to the pit
- **v15** ▲ I caused a mourning
- **v16** ▲ I made the nations to shake at the sound of his fall
- **v18** ⚠ thou shalt lie in the midst of the uncircumcised
- **v18** ◷ This is Pharaoh and all his multitude

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

01 Observation

WHAT DOES THE TEXT SAY?

KEY VERSE · EZEKIEL 31:9 (KJV)

9 ▲ I have made him fair by the multitude of his branches: so that all the ⇄ trees of Eden, that were in the ⇄ garden of God, ⚠ envied him.

Setting

"In the eleventh year, in the third month, on the first of the month, the word of the LORD came to me" (v1) — the eleventh year of Jehoiachin's exile, about June 587 BC. Jerusalem is under Babylonian siege

and will fall in a few weeks (Jer 39:2). Many in Judah still hope Egypt will save them. God sends Ezekiel to Egypt's king, almost certainly Pharaoh Hophra (Jer 44:30), with a question and a parable.

Structure

- vv1–2 — **the question:** "Son of man, say to Pharaoh king of Egypt and to his hordes, 'Whom are you like in your greatness?'" (v2).
- vv3–9 — **the great cedar:** "Behold, Assyria was a cedar in Lebanon with beautiful branches and forest shade, and very high, and its top was among the clouds" (v3). "The waters made it grow, the deep made it high" (v4). "All great nations lived under its shade" (v6). "No tree in God's garden could compare with it in its beauty" (v8). God says, "I made it beautiful" — and "all the trees of Eden, which were in the garden of God, were jealous of it" (v9).
- vv10–14 — **the cedar cut down:** because "its heart is haughty in its loftiness" (v10), "I will give it into the hand of a despot of the nations … According to its wickedness I have driven it away" (v11). "Alien tyrants of the nations have cut it down and left it" (v12). Birds and beasts now live on its ruin (v13), "so that all the trees by the waters may not be exalted in their stature" (v14). "they have all been given over to death, to the earth beneath … with those who go down to the pit" (v14).
- vv15–17 — **the fall into Sheol:** "On the day when it went down to Sheol I caused lamentations" (v15). "I made the nations quake at the sound of its fall" (v16). The trees of Eden are "comforted in the earth beneath" (v16). Its allies "also went down with it to Sheol" (v17).
- v18 — **the point for Pharaoh:** "To which among the trees of Eden are you thus equal in glory and greatness? Yet you will be brought down with the trees of Eden to the earth beneath." "So is Pharaoh and all his hordes!"

Repeated words

greatness (vv2, 7, 18); branches (vv3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 12, 13); boughs (vv5, 6, 8, 12); shade (vv3, 6, 12, 17); waters (vv4, 5, 7, 14, 15); top among the clouds (vv3, 10, 14); beautiful / beauty (vv3, 7, 8, 9); garden of God / God's garden (vv8, 9); trees of Eden (vv9, 16, 18); Lebanon (vv3, 15, 16); Sheol (vv15, 16, 17); pit (vv14, 16); earth beneath (vv14, 16, 18).

Contrasts

a cedar with its top among the clouds (v3) ⟷ a trunk lying in the ravines (v12). Nations living under its shade (v6) ⟷ peoples going down from its shade and leaving it (v12). "I made it beautiful" (v9) ⟷ "its heart is haughty in its loftiness" (v10). Envied by the trees of Eden (v9) ⟷ lying with them in the earth beneath (v16). Egypt's glory and greatness (v18) ⟷ Egypt among the uncircumcised (v18).

Chapter theme (my words)

God tells Pharaoh to look at Assyria — the tallest tree in the forest, fed by deep waters, sheltering the nations — and then look at the stump. God made it great; pride brought it down. Egypt is no taller than Assyria was, and it will fall the same way. Height is a gift from God, never a fortress against Him.

02 Interpretation

WHAT DOES THE TEXT MEAN?

KEY VERSE · EZEKIEL 31:1 (KJV)

[1]And it came to pass in the eleventh year, in the third month, in the first day of the month, that the word of the LORD came unto me, saying,

A question to a proud king (vv1–2)

This is the fifth of Ezekiel's seven oracles against Egypt (chs 29–32), given about two months after the one in 30:20 and, Guzik notes, roughly a month before Jerusalem's final fall. Vawter and Hoppe, in Guzik: "In the allegory of the tree, Ezekiel helps Judah to see its fate from a more universal perspective." Judah is not the only nation under judgment, and Egypt is not the savior Judah hoped for.

The cedar of Lebanon (vv3–9)

Who is the tree? Some older writers (Poole, Trapp, Clarke) think of the ancient Assyria of Nimrod and Babel; Guzik calls that unlikely. Some read the Hebrew not as "Assyria" but as a kind of tree (Morgan's view), so that the whole chapter describes Egypt itself; Guzik calls that a remote possibility. Guzik's view is the plain one: God describes Assyria while speaking to Egypt. Block, in Guzik: "The context requires a symbol of imperial greatness with which Egypt could be compared." The example was fresh: Nineveh fell to the Babylonians and Medes in 612 BC, and Assyria's last forces were finished off within a few years. Wiersbe's logic, in Guzik: "if Babylon can conquer Assyria, Babylon can conquer Egypt." The water imagery fits Egypt too. Alexander, in Guzik: "Egypt, of course, equally prided herself in her unending supply of Nile water." Like Assyria, Egypt offered shade to smaller nations — and some in Jerusalem were hiding under it. Notice v9: "I made it beautiful." Block's point, in Guzik, is that the tree's glory was not its own doing.

The despot and the lumberjacks (vv10–12)

The charge is pride: it "set its top among the clouds, and its heart is haughty in its loftiness" (v10). So God gives it "into the hand of a despot of the nations" (v11). Guzik identifies this with Nebuchadnezzar — the same king God will now send against Egypt. Wright, in Guzik, detects "the Satanic impulse to pride" (compare 28:17). Block pictures rough lumberjacks who drop the tree and leave it broken across the hills and ravines. Note who is acting: "I have driven it away" (v11). Babylon swings the axe, but God judges.

A lesson for every tree (vv13–14)

Birds and beasts that once nested in the branches now perch on the fallen trunk (v13). God's purpose is stated plainly — "so that all the trees by the waters may not be exalted in their stature" (v14). Feinberg, in Guzik: "God had an educative purpose in the fall of Assyria: to teach the nations the folly of striving for earthly might." And all of them, however tall, "have all been given over to death" (v14). Taylor, in Guzik: "Death is the great equalizer and the surest antidote to an excess of ambition."

Down to Sheol (vv15–17)

Sheol is the realm of the dead. God dries up the deep that fed the tree and makes Lebanon mourn (v15). Guzik suggests the held-back rivers may also point to Egypt's canals failing when the Nile ran low. The nations quake (v16) because if Assyria can fall, so can they. The other "trees of Eden" — kingdoms already in the grave — are "comforted" (v16): the great one has joined them. Block, in Guzik: "No matter how high and mighty a tree may have been during its earthly existence, in death all are equal." Its allies, those who "lived under its shade," go down with it (v17). This is poetic imagery of judgment and death, not a detailed map of the afterlife; the fuller picture comes later in Scripture (Luke 16:19–31; Rev 20:13–14).

"So is Pharaoh" (v18)

The question of v2 returns. Whichever tree Pharaoh compares himself to, he will fall like it. Egypt will lie "in the midst of the uncircumcised, with those who were slain by the sword." Smith, in Guzik: "Since the Egyptians practiced circumcision, to spend eternity with those who were uncircumcised would be the ultimate humiliation." Feinberg adds that the Egyptians were obsessive about burial, which made this fate even more shameful. Guzik's conclusion: the chapter speaks of Assyria, but it is aimed at Egypt.

Word study (Hebrew)

- **hordes — *hamon* (H1995):** a multitude, crowd, tumult.
- **greatness — *godel* (H1433):** magnitude, greatness; often of pride.
- **Assyria — *Ashshur* (H804):** Assyria, the empire centered on Nineveh.
- **cedar — *erez* (H730):** the cedar, strongest and tallest of trees.
- **branches — *anaph* (H6057):** a branch, bough.
- **clouds — *aboth* (H5688):** something interwoven — thick foliage, clouds.
- **beautiful — *yapheh* (H3303):** fair, lovely.
- **jealous — *qana* (H7065):** to be jealous, envious.
- **haughty — *rum* (H7311):** to be high, lifted up; to exalt oneself.
- **despot — *ayil* (H352):** a ram; figuratively a strong leader, mighty one.
- **wickedness — *resha* (H7562):** wickedness, guilt.
- **Sheol — *sheol* (H7585):** the underworld, the grave.
- **pit — *bor* (H953):** a pit, cistern; the grave.
- **quake — *raash* (H7493):** to shake, tremble.
- **comforted — *nacham* (H5162):** to be consoled; to be sorry.
- **uncircumcised — *arel* (H6189):** uncircumcised; outside the covenant, unclean.

Cross-references

Gen 2:8–10; Ps 1:3; Ps 37:35–36; Ps 92:12; Prov 16:18; Isa 2:12–13; Isa 10:12–19; Isa 14:9–15; Isa 31:1–3; Jer 2:18; Jer 44:30; Ezek 17:22–24; Ezek 28:17; Ezek 32:18–32; Dan 4:10–17; Nah 3:18–19; Matt 13:31–32; Luke 1:52; Jas 4:6; 1 Pet 5:5.

03 Application

HOW DOES IT CHANGE ME?

KEY VERSE · EZEKIEL 31:14 (KJV)

14 To the end that none of all the trees by the waters exalt themselves for their height, neither shoot up their top among the thick boughs, neither their trees stand up in their height, all that drink water: for they are all delivered unto death, to the nether parts of the earth, in the midst of the children of men, with them that go down to the pit.

Command to obey — "do not be exalted."

God cut down Assyria "so that all the trees by the waters may not be exalted in their stature" (v14). I'm meant to learn from someone else's fall instead of repeating it. Whatever God has grown in me — a ministry, a skill, a business, books — I'll keep my top out of the clouds and humble myself under His hand (1 Pet 5:6).

Sin to confess — forgetting who made me tall

"I made it beautiful," God said (v9). Assyria forgot, and its heart grew haughty (v10). I confess the times I've taken credit for what God gave — the gifts, the opportunities, the people who helped. Every inch of growth came from waters I didn't dig.

Warning to heed — the shade of the wrong tree

Judah wanted to rest under Egypt's shade, and the nations who "lived under its shade" went down to Sheol with Assyria (v17). The men I disciple know this. The crew, the dealer, the gang, the man with money and connections — big trees offer shade, and when they fall they take everyone under them down too. I want to point men to a better shelter.

Promise to trust — God brings down the high tree

Assyria looked untouchable; God dropped it in a day. For the man in prison who feels crushed by powers bigger than he is — systems, enemies, his own past — God is still the One who says, "I bring down the high tree, exalt the low tree" (Ezek 17:24). No power is too tall for God to deal with.

Example to follow — learn from the stump

God put Assyria's fall on display for the nations to learn from (vv13–14). In recovery, men learn from other men's stories — the ones who went back out and didn't make it, and the ones who stayed humble and lived. I'll tell those stories honestly, including my own, so another man doesn't have to fall to learn.

Worship

The Lord GOD plants the cedars and waters them. He makes them beautiful and He cuts them down. The nations quake at His judgments, and death levels every king. He alone is high and lifted up.

Prayer

Lord GOD, everything good in my life is a tree You planted and watered. Keep my heart from growing haughty in its height. When I'm tempted to trust the shade of a powerful man instead of You, turn me back. Make me low enough to be safe in Your hands, and let the men I serve find shelter in Christ, the tree that never falls. Amen.