

The Dragon and the Pit:

When Nations Play God

A

1 32 In the twelfth year, in the twelfth month, on the first day of the month, the word of the Lord came to me: ²“Son of man, raise a lamentation over **Pharaoh king of Egypt** and say to him:

“You consider yourself a lion of the nations, but you are like a dragon in the **seas**; you burst forth in your **rivers**, trouble the waters with your feet, and foul their **rivers**.

2 ³ Thus says the Lord God:
I will throw my net over you
with a host of many peoples,
and they will haul you up in my drag-net.

⁴ And I will cast you on the **ground**;
on the open **field** I will fling you,
and will cause all the birds of the heavens to settle on you,
and I will gorge the beasts of the whole **earth** with you.

⁵ I will strew your flesh upon the **mountains**
and fill the valleys with your carcass.

⁶ I will drench the land even to the **mountains**
with your flowing blood,
and the ravines will be full of you.

3 ⁷ When I blot you out, I will cover the **heavens**
and make their **stars** dark;
I will cover the **sun** with a cloud,
and the moon shall not give its light.

⁸ All the bright lights of **heaven**
will I make dark over you,
and put darkness on your land,
declares the Lord God.

B

¹⁷ In the twelfth year, in the twelfth month, on the fifteenth day of the month, the word of the Lord came to me: ¹⁸ “Son of man, wail over **the multitude of Egypt**, and send them down, her and the daughters of majestic nations, to **the world below**, to those who have gone **down to the pit**:

¹⁹ ‘Whom do you surpass in beauty?

Go down and be laid to rest with the uncircumcised.’

²⁰ They shall fall amid those who are **slain by the sword**. Egypt is delivered to the sword; drag her away, and **all her multitudes**. ²¹ The mighty chiefs shall speak of them, with their helpers, out of the midst of Sheol: ‘They have **come down**, they lie still, the uncircumcised, **slain by the sword**.’

²² “**Assyria** is there, and all her company, its graves all around it, all of them slain, **fallen** (nōpālîm) **by the sword**,

²³ whose graves are set in the uttermost parts of the pit; and her company is all around her grave, all of them slain, **fallen by the sword**, who spread terror in the **land of the living**.

²⁴ “**Elam** is there, and all her multitude around her grave; all of them slain, **fallen by the sword**, who went down uncircumcised into the world below, who spread their terror in the **land of the living**; and they bear their shame with those who go **down to the pit**. ²⁵ They have made her a bed among the slain with all her multitude, her graves all around it, all of them uncircumcised, **slain** (ḥālālîm) **by the sword**; for terror of them was spread in the **land of the living**, and they bear their shame with those who go **down to the pit**; they are placed among the slain.

- 4 ⁹ “I will trouble the hearts of many peoples, when I bring your destruction among the nations, into the countries that you have not known. ¹⁰ I will make many peoples appalled at you, and the hair of their kings shall bristle with horror because of you, when I brandish my sword before them. They shall tremble every moment, every one for his own life, on the day of your downfall.
- 5 ¹¹ “For thus says the Lord God: The sword of the king of Babylon shall come upon you. ¹² I will cause your multitude to fall by the swords of mighty ones, all of them most ruthless of nations.
 “They shall bring to ruin the pride of Egypt, and all its multitude shall perish.
¹³ I will destroy all its beasts from beside many waters; and no foot of man shall trouble them anymore, nor shall the hoofs of beasts trouble them.
¹⁴ Then I will make their waters clear, and cause their rivers to run like oil, declares the Lord God.
¹⁵ When I make the land of Egypt desolate, and when the land is desolate of all that fills it,
 when I strike down all who dwell in it, then they will know that I am the Lord.
- 6 ¹⁶ This is a lamentation that shall be chanted; the daughters of the nations shall chant it; over Egypt, and over all her multitude, shall they chant it, declares the Lord God.”
- ²⁶ “Meshech-Tubal is there, and all her multitude, her graves all around it, all of them uncircumcised, slain by the sword; for they spread their terror in the land of the living.
²⁷ And they do not lie with the mighty, the fallen from among the uncircumcised, who went down to Sheol with their weapons of war, whose swords were laid under their heads, and whose iniquities are upon their bones; for the terror of the mighty men was in the land of the living. ²⁸ But as for you, you shall be broken and lie among the uncircumcised, with those who are slain by the sword.
- ²⁹ “Edom is there, her kings and all her princes, who for all their might are laid with those who are killed by the sword; they lie with the uncircumcised, with those who go down to the pit.
- ³⁰ “The princes of the north are there, all of them, and all the Sidonians, who have gone down in shame with the slain, for all the terror that they caused by their might; they lie uncircumcised with those who are slain by the sword, and bear their shame with those who go down to the pit.
- ³¹ “When Pharaoh sees them, he will be comforted for all his multitude, Pharaoh and all his army, slain by the sword, declares the Lord God. ³² For I spread terror in the land of the living; and he shall be laid to rest among the uncircumcised, with those who are slain by the sword, Pharaoh and all his multitude, declares the Lord God.”

Ezekiel 32:1-32

Rise and Fall

All nations rise. All nations fall. God is the cause of both. Some, however, rise to the greatest of heights: Atlantis (pre-Flood), Babel, Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, the Medes and Persians, Greece, Rome, The Byzantines, the Caliphates, the Mongols, the Ottomans, The Spanish, the British, the United States. Each of these civilizations was blessed by God in mighty ways. Those who deny this would have to deny that God is sovereign over their rise as well as their fall.

But in the course of time, all human civilizations end up with that seed of pride in their heart. That pride is exemplified by the supernatural predecessor of all who long ago said in his heart, “I will ascend to heave; above the stars of God I will set my throne on high; I will sit on the mount of assembly in the far reaches of the north” (Isa 14:13). This is the inevitable hubris that comes to the children of men in our darkened depravity, just as it came to the serpent before us. After all, that very statement was said to be made not only by Lucifer (Vulgate), but by the king of Babylon (vs. 3), a double fulfillment. Daniel 4:30 has the king of Babylon say 150 years after Isaiah, “Is not this great Babylon, which I have built by my mighty power as a royal residence and for the glory of my majesty?”

The ruler-prince of Tyre is similar. He said, “I am a god, I sit in the seat of the gods, in the heart of the seas” (Ezek 28:2). Yet, it was the cherub before him who was given the greatest privileges of Eden’s divine council and was “blameless in your ways, from the day you were created, till unrighteousness was found in you ... and you sinned” (15-16). The King of Assyria was the same when he said, “By the strength of my hand I have done it, and by my wisdom ... I have removed the boundaries of people ... and like a mighty man I have brought down those who sat on thrones” (Isa 10:12-14). For it was Nineveh its capitol city who emulated God himself saying, “I am, and there is no one else” (Zeph 2:15).

Similar boasts have been made through history. Alexander the Great said, “I would weep, for there are no more worlds to conquer” (Plutarch, *Life of Alexander* 15). In ancient Greece, after taking out the Persians, Athenians said, “We will not go out of our way to prove at length that we have a right to rule ... The strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must” (Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War* 5:89). Of course, “The sun never sets on the British Empire.”

Ezek 32 in Context

Today we will see **Egypt** who also said something similar in Ezekiel's day. In the first Egypt oracle that mirrors the first of the two we will look at as a pair today, Egypt said, “**My Nile is mine, and I made it for myself**” (**Ezek 29:3**). Our two oracles will take us to **the end of the OANs** (Oracles Against the Nations) in Ezekiel. All of them demonstrate that even though they are not in a gracious covenant relationship with the LORD like Israel was, nevertheless, they *are* in a covenant relationship with him via creation and/or Noah—a covenant of works. *All* nations and *all* kings are under covenantal obligation to **carry out justice**. They are to care for the orphan and widow (**Ps 82:2-4**, etc.) by *not* creating laws that harm them much less actually take advantage of them, by *not* attacking God's people to kill and cause them to suffer (**Ezek 25**), and so on. For they will all be judged by him, “**So that you may know that I am the LORD**,” the most repeated phrase found in all of them.

Recall that I began our OANs with **2 Chron 7:14**: “**If my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and**

heal their land.” Curiously, this was literally read from the Oval Office this past Tuesday evening by President Trump. I bring it up here just to reinforce what we began with in the OANs. We must remember that this promise was originally given to ancient Israel, not to any other nation. *America is not God’s chosen covenant people*; that designation belongs to the church, the Israel of God (*Gal 6:16*) alone. Nevertheless, like the pagan city of Nineveh in the days of Jonah, any nation — including our own — that humbles itself, repents, and turns from its wickedness can still experience God’s temporal mercy and blessing, even as Babylon did when Nebuchadnezzar confessed the Lord as God. For that verse in the Chronicles contains a universal principle that applies to everyone, since everyone is in a covenant relationship with God.

In *our first oracle* (Col 1 above), Pharaoh/Egypt is once more likened to the *dragon*. We saw this back in ch. 29 in the first oracle against Egypt.¹ It begins with the “*Word of the LORD*” (*Ezek 32:1*) who gives the speech of the “*Lord GOD*” (Sovereign LORD; 3 ff.), with no indication that

¹ It was strange to me that the “dragon” theme would come in the first and sixth of seven oracles, rather than in the seventh. But I think the weave actually answers why. The sixth and seventh oracles are woven together, or at least they certainly do have a remarkable ability to play off each other. Meanwhile, the first oracle against Egypt was actually paired with Sidon, meaning that in the weave, the Dragon prophecies stand as second and next-to-last, exactly as we might expect.

there is a different speaker. In other words, the Word *must* be the Sovereign LORD. And this Word of God, this Sovereign Lord, then fights as the Divine Warrior against the Egypt-Pharoah dragon.

This thought takes me on a necessary diversion, because I really want you to understand the fullness of our oracles. It is necessary because as we saw in Ch. 29, the dragon is representing something supernatural. For as Heiser says, “The point of the analogy is that Pharaoh is being compared to *supernatural opposition* to Yahweh’s order. He’s being compared to *supernatural forces* that fight against Yahweh’s ordered world ... because it’s a supernatural metaphor.”² The supernatural forces are not purely chaos, but in the NT at least, are personified by Satan. For as John said, “The great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world” (Rev 12:9). The “whole world” includes Egypt. Curiously, “dragon” means “serpent” and derives from both a Greek (*derkomai*) and PEI word (*derk*) meaning “to see.” In other words, a “sharp-sighted one” or maybe “a Watcher.”

Now, our passage does not mention Satan at all, and it could be reading in something that isn’t here to say that *this*

² Michael S. Heiser, “Naked Bible Podcast Transcript: Episode 146 Ezekiel 32,” *Naked Bible Podcast* (Feb 18, 2017), 7.

exact heavenly being is in mind as being the supernatural evil lurking in the background. Nevertheless, **the Jews themselves** identified Satan as the chief antagonist of Moses during the Exodus in Egypt. They called him **Mastema**, “**Chief of spirits**” (**Jubilees 10:7, 11**), whose name means “**Hostility**.” It was he who **attempted to kill Moses** (**Ex 4:24-26; Jub 48:1-3**), who **hardened Pharaoh’s heart** (**48:15-17**), who **helped the Egyptian sorcerers** perform their miracles (**48:9-10**), who **killed the firstborn** of Egypt (**49:2**), and who **incites Pharaoh to chase** Israel to the sea (**48:15-19**). Some of these obviously give a different take than the Bible, and it’s why Jubilees isn’t a biblical book. But it nevertheless shows you that we actually have Satan himself deeply associated with Egypt *in Jewish thinking*.

This becomes more meaningful when we then realize that **Isaiah and Ezekiel both** talk about the entity in Eden, which Genesis calls the serpent and John calls the serpent and Satan. Isaiah says that he who ascended to the height in his pride is brought down low to the **depth of Sheol and the pit**. “**How you are fallen from heaven, O Shining One, son of Dawn! How you are cut down to the ground you who laid the nations low!**” (**Isa 14:12**). Sound familiar? Remember the serpent in the garden? “**Because you have done this, cursed**

are you above all livestock and above all beasts of the field; *on your belly you shall go, and the dust you shall eat* all the days of your life” (Gen 3:14). This wasn’t about a talking snake losing his legs. It was about an angelic cherubim being cursed to a position lower than the beasts of the field. The most exalted of creatures brought to a position of insects and snakes.

Ezekiel says, “You were anointed guardian cherub. I placed you; you were on the holy mountain of God” (Ezek 28:14). But you “sinned; so *I cast you as a profane thing from the mountain of God*, and I destroyed you, O guardian cherub” (16). “Your heart was proud because of your beauty; you corrupted your wisdom for the sake of your splendor. *I cast you to the ground ... you have come to a dreadful end and shall be no more forever*” (17, 19).

“Whom are you thus like in glory and in greatness among the trees of Eden? You shall be *brought down with the trees of Eden to the world below*. You shall lie among the uncircumcised, with those who are slain by the sword” (31:18). “I made the nations quake as the sound of [your] fall, when *I cast [you] down to Sheol* with those who go down to the pit” (16).

This bringing low of the dragon by God or the Divine Warrior is talked about in **Revelation 12:7-9** as a war between Michael and *the Dragon*. “Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon. And the dragon and his angels fought back, but he was defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. And the great dragon was *thrown down*, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the

Fall of the Serpent in Various Related Texts					
Genesis 3:14	Isaiah 14:12, 15	Ezekiel 28:8, 14, 16, 17	Ezekiel 31:16, 17	John 12:31-32	Revelation 12:4, 7–9
The LORD God said to the serpent, “Because you have done this, cursed are you above all livestock, and above all the beasts of the field; on your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life.”	How you are fallen from heaven, Day Star, son of Dawn! How you are cut down to the ground... you are brought down to Sheol, to the far reaches of the pit.	They shall thrust you down into the pit, and you shall die the death... guardian cherub... I cast you as a profane thing from the mountain of God... I cast you to the ground... Your heart was proud because of your beauty... I cast you to the ground.	I made the nations quake at the sound of its fall, when I cast it down to Sheol with those who go down to the pit... They also went down to Sheol with it, to those who are slain by the sword.	“Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.”	[The dragon’s] tail swept down a third of the stars of heaven and cast them to the earth... war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon. And the dragon and his angels fought back, but he was defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.

earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.” Do you hear it? It’s all the same language, though these falls take place at different times. Like this final fall which John immediately explains. “And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, ‘Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been *thrown down*, who accuses them day and night before our God. And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb” (10-11). Or as it puts it in John’s exact parallel, thus demonstrating that Michael is Jesus, “Now is the judgment of this world; now will *the ruler of this world be cast out*. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself” (John 12:31-32).³

Amazingly, it seems like every ancient culture had the same story. They just retold the true story with *their perverted lies*. They often made Satan himself the divine warrior who defeated a Chaos Dragon. In India it is *Indra* vs. *Vritra*, the chaos dragon that blocks the waters. For the Assyrians it was *Tispak* who kills *Mušḫuššu*, the lion-dragon.

³ What do I mean “different falls?” Think of each “fall” as a further restriction or defeat in response to God’s redemptive plan (creation → incarnation → cross/resurrection → kingdom advance → final judgment). The image of a hydra might help. This beast has multiple heads. You can cut one off, but others remain until all the heads are defeated.

In Babylon where Ezekiel was it was **Marduk** who slays Tiamat (the etymological twin of the Heb. *tehom*—the Deep). For the Canaanites it is **Baal** vs. Lotan—the etymological twin of Leviathan—the seven headed dragon. For the Norse it was **Thor** who slayed the Midgard-Ouroboros serpent Jörmungandr. For the Greeks it was **Zeus** who killed Typhon. For the Egyptians it was **Set** who every night had to slay the chaos dragon Apophis.

Incredibly, every single one of these deities—and there are a lot of deities to choose from, all share **storm-god credentials**, the same as Satan who falls “**like lightning**” because he is Baal/Zeus. Perhaps the reason why is that it is literally Satan who is behind the inspiration of each of them, and this evil creature inspired culture after culture to praise him under the guise of other names. Makes sense, for Satan is the ultimate usurper of God and the reason this all matters to our oracles today is because every nation that exalts itself in pride is acting just like Satan.

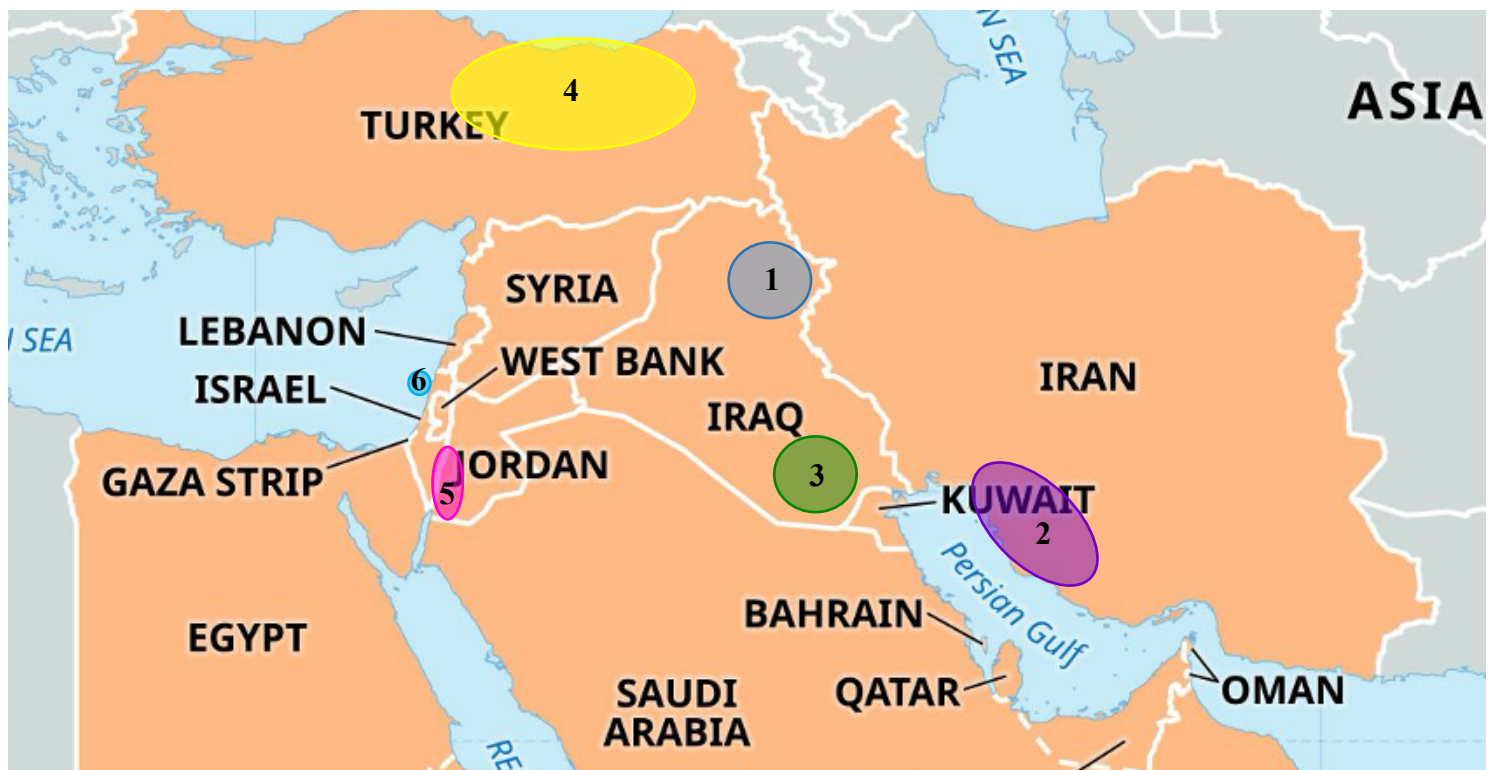
That brings us to **the second oracle**, because while the first calls Egypt the dragon, the second oracle takes us to **the rest of the nations**, returning back to where we begin the entire cycle (**Ch. 25ff**). This oracle shows that **it isn't just Egypt**. It is in fact all nations who act like this and they will all suffer

the same fate, begin slain, falling by the sword, to **the doom of the pit in Sheol**. The doom that Jesus says is “**eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels**” (**Matt 25:41**). Or as John puts it “**the lake of fire**” which is the permanent punishment that comes even after Sheol-Hades is thrown into it (**Rev 20:14**).

This is a terrifying reality made even starker when you read the two oracles side by side, as it is certainly possible that it was to be read. For **both begin** in the “**twelfth year, in the twelfth month**.” Importantly, these along with the first oracle which also speaks about the dragon are the only ones that take place **after the fall of Jerusalem**. They clearly belong together even as they came virtually at the same time to the prophet who heard them.

There are two interesting **progressions** that are meaningful when reading them together. The first is **vertical**. We go from the seas and rivers (**Ezek 32:2**) to the ground and field and earth (**4**), to the mountains (**5-6**), to the heavens and stars and sun (**7-8**). This depicts **a great rise** from the depths of the earth to the top of heaven, exactly like Isaiah 14 and Helel, only to end in a downfall at the hands of Babylon. While only *implied* in the first oracle, it is **a fall** to the grave(s) (**22, 23, 24, 25, 26**), Sheol (**21, 27**) and the pit (**18, 23, 24, 25,**

29, 30) that become *explicit* in the second. In other words, the second completes the first. The second has a **horizontal** movement: Assyria (22), Elam (24), Meshech-Tubal (26), Edom (29), and Sidon (30). When you look on a map, this order brings them from the first and greatest and then the farthest away to nearer to nearer to right on the doorstep of Israel. Clearly then, the two oracles should be read together.



Key:

- | | |
|---------------|---------------------|
| ● Assyria (1) | ● Meshech-Tubal (3) |
| ● Babylon | ● Edom (4) |
| ● Elam (2) | ● Sidon (5) |

Rise of the Dragon (Ezek 32:1-16)

The first oracle takes place **March 3, 585 BC**, two years after the fall of Jerusalem. The Word of the Lord came to the “son of man” (**Ezek 32:1**) to “**raise a lamentation over Pharaoh king of Egypt**” (**2**). “Lamentation” is that *qinah* **lament** with a longer 3, shorter two beat rhythm that we’ve seen in the past. So what is about to unfold is a dirge, a sad song for Egypt.

The Word says to Pharaoh, “**You consider yourself a lion of the nations, but you are like a dragon in the seas; you burst forth in your rivers, trouble the waters with your feet, and foul their river**” (**2b**). This is deeply ironic of the very person who said back in Ch. 29, “**My Nile is my own, I made it for myself**” (**29:3**). He’s stinking up the river and troubling the waters—a sign that the waters of Egypt are becoming **chaotic**, as if a great storm were brewing over them, threatening all life and order.

But this is no act of nature. As it was in that parallel verse in **29:3**, this is the **great dragon**. Egypt is called or likened to the dragon many times in the OT (**Ps 74:13-14; 87:4; Isa 30:7; 51:9**). But why Egypt of all the nations? Why is *it* called the dragon and no one else? It’s likely because Egypt

more than any other nation is identified with its main water feature and because it is the archetypal enemy of God's people. It all goes back to Moses. It is the perfect subversive metaphor.

Ironically, in their own stories, the greatest threat to cosmic order in Egypt was [the chaos serpent Apophis](#) (Apep), who tried every night to devour the sun god Ra and plunge the world into darkness. Set the Storm god fought him nightly on the solar barque in the underworld and order returned again as sunrise. No one ever worshiped Apophis. He was the ultimate enemy of *ma'at* (order). [Egypt](#) knows full well what God means by calling him the dragon!

But again, in the Bible, it is [Satan](#) who is the dragon. Curiously, Set shares more features in common with Zeus and Baal than any other Egyptian God. They could all be Satan! Therefore, Ezekiel flips the script. Rather than the storm god being the hero who vanquishes the dragon, he becomes the dragon who must be vanquished!

There is a strange association here, however, with [a lion](#). He thinks he's a lion. God calls him a dragon. I can't help but thinking of how [Jesus is the Lion of Judah](#), and how such an epitaph for himself is another kind of usurping of Christ. In fact, Ezekiel has already identified Jerusalem with the

Lion (cf. [19:3](#)). But there may be something else going on here. Many scholars have been puzzled as to why a lion (the king of the land) would be matched with the dragon (the king of the seas). Some are so baffled by it they say the text must be corrupt.

But a scholar named Theodore Lewis went to work on this puzzle and discovered a surprising thing.⁴ In a little known Akkadian myth (CT 13.33-34) about the god [Tish-pak](#), whom we saw above, he fought a huge dragon/serpent creature called [Mušḫuššu](#). In that story, however, the monster is called [both a dragon and a lion \(labbu\)](#). Iconography show a composite beast with a lion body/head but long serpentine necks/tails that are often intertwined like a double-helix. In doing this, the suggestion is that we have one great mythological feature that captures both the most feared land animal and sea animal—the ultimate monster.

If this is in the background, and there are also [Egyptian counterparts](#) of this (see picture below), then the idea is more than that Egypt thinks he's the "[king of the jungle](#)," the top dog of the nations, which actually doesn't make a lot of sense, because he knows Babylon is. It's that [he's actually](#)

⁴ [Theodore J. Lewis](#), "[CT 13.33-34 and Ezekiel 32: Lion-Dragon Myths](#)," JAOS 116:1 (Jan-Mar 1996): 28-47.

denying his own composite nature. This is classic human pride that refuses to acknowledge one's sin and rebellion. It's the ultimate disassociation with reality. His pride (pardon the pun) keeps him from seeing the reality of the matter. Like Dr. Jekyll who is also Mr. Hyde, he's a composite. He is a slithering, serpentine enemy of all good and order in the world and he justifies it by only looking to the supposed good side, which is itself usurping the Lion of Judah!



Fig. 8. W. M. Flinders Petrie, *Ceremonial Slate Palettes: Flinders Petrie Centenary 1953*. British School of Egyptian Archaeology, vol. 66 (A). (London: British School of Egyptian Archaeology, 1953), plate F16 (Predynastic). Courtesy of the Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford.



Fig. 9. W. M. Flinders Petrie, *Ceremonial Slate Palettes*, plate B8 (Predynastic). Courtesy of Musée du Louvre.

Serpopards — hybrid creatures with lion/leopard bodies and heads but long, serpentine necks. In Lewis, 35.



Fig. 7. A. Gardiner, *Egypt of the Pharaohs* (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1961), plate XXII (= ANEP #297) (Dynasty I; Hierakonpolis [Kom el-Ahmar]).



Fig. 6. H. Frankfort, *Cylinder Seals*, plate IVh; cf. E. Porada, *Ancient Art in Seals* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1980), 31, fig. I-1 (Uruk).

Egypt vs. Babylon and their hybrid lion-dragon creatures. Lewis, 34.⁵

At any rate, that's the initial picture—the **greatest of all monsters** fouling up the waters and bringing chaos to the world of men. “Thus says the Lord GOD: I will throw my net over you with a host of many peoples, and they will haul you up in my dragnet. And I will cast you on the ground; on the open field I will fling you, and will cause all the birds of the heavens to settle on you, and I will gorge the beasts of the whole earth with you” (**Ezek 32:3-4**). It is **God**, now, who **becomes the divine warrior**, not Pharaoh, not Set. Christ! And as all Chaoskampf stories go, the divine warrior *will* defeat the dragon.

He **hauls him easily out of the waters** by his net. Amazing, when you consider Leviathan in Job 41 and how no human can even touch a single scale on his body, let alone

⁵ It was reminded in looking at some of these pictures about the DNA speculation in my Giants book. I won't comment more here, but see **Douglas Van Dorn**, *Giants: Sons of the gods Tenth Anniversary Revised and Expanded* (Dacono, CO: Waters of Creation Pub., 2023), 56-60.

haul him in. In one of the classic lines of that speech of God, “Lay your hands on him; remember the battle—you will not do it again!” (Job 41:8). But God has no problem at all subduing him.

He takes him up out of the water and casts him on the ground, in the open field to mock him who is now out of his element. But then, he will “strew you flesh upon the mountains and fill the valley with your carcass.” He will “drench the land even to the mountains with your flowing blood” (Ezek 32:5-6). This beast is huge! But notice how we’ve gone from the sea below the earth, to the ground, and now to the mountains. We are going upward. It all ends in heaven. “When I blot you out, I will cover the heavens and make their stars dark; I will cover the sun with a cloud, and the moon shall not give its light. All the bright lights of heaven will I make dark over you, and put darkness on your land, declares the Lord GOD” (7-8). This is poetic language of his fellow angelic entities now growing silent, like the trees of Eden in the last chapter that went down to the pit. Because the mighty dragon is slain, the whole of creation stands in awe and keeps silent, which is figured as “darkness.”

The first half concludes “I will trouble the hearts of many peoples, when I bring your destruction among the nations, into the countries that you have not known. I will make many peoples appalled at you, and the hair of their kings shall bristle with horror because of you, when I brandish my sword before them. They shall tremble every moment, every one for his own life, on the day of your downfall” (9-10). When I publicly humiliate and destroy the dragon, the surrounding nations will be terror-stricken. They will look at what happens to Egypt and realize, “If God can do this to Egypt, what will He do to us?” This is a setup for the next oracle!

The second half of this oracle in some ways parallels the first. However, it has a different agent now working to destroy the dragon: Babylon! Throughout these OANs, God had said he is the cause *and* Babylon is the cause. This is not a contradiction. God is the First Cause. Babylon is the instrument in his hand. “For thus says the Lord God: The sword of the king of Babylon shall come upon you. I will cause your multitude to fall by the swords of mighty ones, all of them most ruthless of nations” (11-12). Swords will become a major theme of the next oracle. God will do this all through the most ruthless nation around. The true king

of the nations from a human perspective, which is certainly not this pretender dragon.

The next **lament returns to the waters** and then **back to the land**, showing the parallel. “**They shall bring to ruin the pride of Egypt, and all its multitude shall perish. I will destroy all its beasts from beside many waters; and no foot of man shall trouble them anymore, nor shall the hoofs of beasts trouble them. Then I will make their waters clear, and cause their rivers to run like oil, declares the Lord GOD**” (12b-14). *Before*: Egypt (the dragon) churns up the waters, fouls the rivers, and brings chaos. *During judgment*: The dragon is dragged out, slaughtered, and its blood drenches the land. The waters are bloody and turbulent. *After the judgment*: The waters become clear and flow peacefully “like oil.” The land is no longer troubled by man or beast. The dragon is no more.

“**When I make the land of Egypt desolate, and when the land is desolate of all that fills it, then they will know that I am the Lord**” (15). **Babylon emulates God**, or rather does what God does and tells it to do. That’s why it moves from waters to land, just like God. But only God is able to bring about the full destruction, the full humiliation of dragon.

That's why it doesn't do anything on the mountains or higher. Babylon, too, is just a man.

The lament ends, “This is a lamentation that shall be chanted; the daughters of the nations shall chant it; over Egypt, and over all her multitude, shall they chant it, declares the Lord God.” Amazing. The nations will sing this song and it will echo through the empty cities and barren wastelands that is now Egypt. This nicely sets us up for the last oracle.

Fall of the Dragon and the Nations (Ezek 32:17-32)

The paired oracle takes place **two weeks after** the one we just saw. The Word of the LORD came to the son of man, “Wail over the multitude of Egypt, and send them down, her and the daughters of majestic nations, to the world below, to those who have gone down to the pit” (17-18). There is no *world below* or *the pit* in the previous oracle. It remained ... unfinished. Egypt is about to fall! Where?

The **world** (or more literally “land,” *'erets*) **below** is a general term for the **underworld**, the subterranean realm of the dead below the waters of the sea. It is a spatial description: “the lower world” or “the netherworld.” It refers to

Sheol, which is always translated as Hades by the LXX. The **pit** (*bôr*) is a more specific and vivid image. It literally means a cistern, well, or hole in the ground, like the Abyss of Revelation 9. It is a synonym of the underworld — a dark, deep, inescapable hole where the dead go. But it is also a clearly supernatural place, even as heaven its counterpart also is.

So the oracle begins with Egypt, as we would expect. “**Whom do you surpass in beauty?**” the question comes out, reminding us of the cherub in **Ezek 28:17**. “**Go down and be laid to rest with the uncircumcised**” (**Ezek 32:19**). “**Uncircumcised**” will be used repeatedly (at least nine times) as a derogatory label for the enemies of God who are spiritually “cut off” from the covenant people, who therefore die in dishonor and end up in the lowest, most shameful part of Sheol. It doesn’t refer to all peoples, but to **God’s enemies**, those who have spread “**terror in the land of the living.**”

“**They shall fall amid those who are slain by the sword. Egypt is delivered to the sword; drag her away, and all her multitudes**” (**20**). Swords, slain, dragged away. This is the language of a **war**. “**The mighty chiefs shall speak of them, with their helpers, out of the midst of Sheol: ‘They have come down, they lie still, the uncircumcised, slain by the sword’**” (**21**). That’s like singing the lament at the end of the last oracle.

But suddenly, a punch in the gut to those nations who were singing the terrifying lament over the now defeated dragon wondering what God might do to them. We read, “Assyria” is there. This is somewhat understandable, given that ch. 31 called Assyria the World Tree that had already been felled. Where is Assyria, that now defeated empire?

“Assyria is there, and all her company, its graves all around it, all of them slain, fallen by the sword, whose graves are set in the uttermost parts of the pit; and her company is all around her grave, all of them slain, fallen by the sword, who spread terror in the land of the living” (22-23). You can easily hear all the same language as before: grave, slain, sword, pit, and so on. But it is the word “fallen” I want to highlight. This is the word *nophelim*. This word might sound similar to another word you’ve heard before in Genesis 6. *Nophelim* means, “To fall.”

Suddenly, we have a new nation introduced. “Elam is there” (24). Elam is where most scholars place the origin of that god Tispak who fought the dragon. But that is probably only incidental to why it is here. Assyria is essentially in northern Iraq. Nineveh is within its borders. Elam much farther away in western Iran. It is strange to mention Elam, given that it isn’t even in Ezekiel other than here. But the

Elamite kingdom (centered in Susa, where Esther will take place) was actually a powerful military power that was crushed by the Assyrians under Ashurbanipal around 640 BC. Thus, they stand as a stark reminder of another **once-terrifying** empire that has been brought low.

We see similar language again. Elam and its multitude around her **grave**, all of them **slain**, **fallen** by the word, who went down **uncircumcised** into the **world below**, who **spread their terror in the land of the living**, with those who go **down to the pit**, etc. (24-25).

But the list of nations does not let up. Next in line is **Meshech-Tubal**, with more of the same language, including “**fallen**” because of their weapons of war (26-28). This seems like a very strange people to bring up. Meshech-Tubal is way far north of Egypt, near the Black Sea in modern Turkey. I want to point out another word used with these people: “**the mighty**.” This is the word ***gibborim***. Why point this out? Because like that other word that sounds so much like *Nophelim*, this word is also found in Genesis 6—in the very same verse. “**The *Nephilim* were on the earth in those days, and also afterward, when the sons of God came in to the daughters of man and they bore children to them. These**

were the mighty men (*gibborim*) who were of old, the men of renown” (Gen 6:4).

In fact, in **verse 27** it talks about “the mighty, the fallen from among the uncircumcised.” “The mighty, the fallen” is literally “*gibborim nophelim*.” Nowhere else do we find anything remotely like this except in Genesis 6:4 where the *Nephilim* are called *gibborim* and both are together translated in the LXX as “giants.” This has caused several scholars to see here at least a word-play on the Genesis 6:4 story.⁶ Others have gone a step farther saying that they believe the Masoretes pointed the text with the wrong vowels,⁷ and the original word *was* Nephilim.

Now, I will say that Heiser, pretty much the world-expert on these matters before he passed away, did not think that the Nephilim could possibly be in view in this passage. The reason is because the verse puts a positive spin on them when it says, “They [Meshech-Tubal] do not lie with the

⁶ Many still maintain that “Nephilim” means “fallen ones,” from this very word *nophelim*. But Heiser and others have shown that this is impossible based on the variant spelling of Nephilim in Nub 13:33. He argues the word is Aramaic and means “giant,” just like the LXX translates it. I agree, but this does not mean that there couldn’t in fact be a word-play on “giants” as “fallen” beings due to the sinful acts of the sons of God in Gen 6:1-4. If so, that’s the word-play being highlighted here in Ezekiel as well.

⁷ On both, see the discussion in Zimmerli, both his translation and note of vs. 26-27, “Mesech-Thubal is there and all her pomp round about her grave, all of them uncircumcised, slain by the sword; for they had once spread terror before them in the land of the living ... And they do not lie beside the heroes who fell in days of old who went down to the underworld with all their weapons of war...” (p. 167-68) and his discussion (175-77).

mighty, the fallen (the supposed Nephilim) among the uncircumcised, who went down to Sheol with their weapons of war, whose swords were laid under their heads...” This reads very much like an honorable burial, rather than a dishonorable one which Meshech-Tubal gets. And there’s no way a biblical author would talk positively about the Nephilim.⁸ And I totally get that point. It was actually convincing to me until I did a little more research.

If you read the rest of the verse, *it isn’t in fact putting a totally positive spin* on these fallen ones. Heiser never mentions that for some reason. It goes on to say, “... *whose iniquities are upon their bones; for the terror of the mighty men was in the land of the living.*” That’s hardly a positive spin for these Might Ones.

Even if it were entirely positive, we learn from the parallel in Hesiod (who as a Greek always puts a positive spin on the demi-gods), that the race of men in the days of Kronos (that would be exactly our time period in Gen 6:1-4) were buried with honor, but also became “pure spirits dwelling on the earth ... roaming everywhere” who would help people. This is the exact parallel but with a positive spin

⁸ See the discussion in Heiser.

of the Nephilim dying and becoming demons.⁹ And I think you should remember that the prophecy [is not to an Israelite](#). It is to a polytheist, so they wouldn't have resonated with these guys being evil in the first place.

Other places in the OT talk about how the Rephaim giants died and are now on their thrones as shades in Hell itself. In fact one of these is found just a few verses before the fall of Lucifer ([Isa 14:9](#); cf. [Job 26:5-6](#), [Ps 88:10-11](#); [Prov 9:18](#)). So that's a parallel to what Ezekiel might be doing here.

Finally, something few have thought about and why I think this even matters. It is a very curious thing that [the only one of the five nations listed here](#)¹⁰ that have this possible allusion to the giants also happens to be the home of the [Sythians](#) in Galatia.¹¹ In my *Giants* book, I go into great detail to explain how the giants migrated to this very region and that the Sythians were themselves depicted as giants!¹² Add to this that we are already in mythological territory and it seems to me to make sense that we could find a jab here at

⁹ For Greek, demons were not always evil. Some were actually helpful and good. See [Hesiod](#), *Works and Days* 120-27.

¹⁰ We can actually take this as the center of the five or the seven (which reinforces that this is a central thought and therefore why it matter): A. Egypt. B. Assyria. C. Elam. D. Meshech-Tubal. C'. Edom. B'. Sidon. A'. Egypt.

¹¹ [Walther Zimmerli](#), Frank Moore Cross, and Klaus Baltzer, *Ezekiel: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel*, Hermeneia—a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979–), 175.

¹² Van Dorn, *Giants Tenth*, 213-17. See esp n. 31 of Ch. 15.

Meshech-Tubal—whose “prince” will return in the very strange oracle against Gog and Magog (**Ezek 38:3**)—that if the giants themselves couldn’t escape such a fate, what makes anyone think that they can?



Left: 4th century B.C. Scythian horseman. Found at the Kul’ Oba kurgan near Kerch (northern Black Sea). Located now in The State Hermitage Museum, Saint Petersburg, Russia. **Right:** Ardashir Coronation from Ahura Mazda, Naqsh-e Rostam, 3rd c. AD. **Note** how the legs of the riders go *all the way to the ground*! These were either very small horses, or very tall men.

Nation in Ezek 32	Noah’s Son	Lineage / Ethnic Group	Direction from Israel
Assyria	Shem	Semitic	Northeast
Elam	Shem	Semitic (Elamites)	East / Far East
Meshech-Tubal	Japheth	Japhethite (Indo-European/Anatolian)	North
Edom	Shem	Semitic (descendants of Esau)	Southeast
Sidon / Princes of the North	Ham / Canaan	Canaanite (Hamite)	West / Northwest
Egypt (the main subject)	Ham	Hamite (Mizraim)	Southwest

¹³ All of these are possibly reinforced by a likely chiasm where Meshech-Tubal is the center of the oracle: chiastic with the A/A' being Egypt, the B/B' being Assyria and Sidon the C/C' being Elam and Edom and D being Meshech-Tubal?

That leads us **Edom** (**Ezek 32:29**). The oracle is short, perhaps because we've already had one against it (**25:14**). "Edom is there, her kings and all her princes, who for all their might are laid with those who are killed by the sword; they lie with the uncircumcised, with those who go down to the pit." Edom is now right on the doorstep of Israel, literally a border nation to the east and south. It is also a lot closer to Egypt than the others.

Finally, "The princes of the north are there, all of them, and all the **Sidonians**, who have gone down in shame with the slain, for all the terror that they caused by their might; they lie uncircumcised with those who are slain by the sword, and bear their shame with those who go down to the pit" (**30**). It was Sidon that began our literary unit *with Egypt* back at the end of Ch. 28. Now it finishes it like a **bookend**.

All that is left is a final word to Egypt. "When Pharaoh sees them, he will be comforted for all his multitude, Pharaoh and all his army, slain by the sword, declares the Lord God. For I spread terror in the land of the living; and he shall be laid to rest among the uncircumcised, with those who are slain by the sword, Pharaoh and all his multitude, declares the Lord God" (**31-32**). This oracle, unlike the previous, has been pretty passive in terms of how the fall of the nations

occurs. Now it returns in full force. “I spread terror in the land of the living,” not the nations. God does this by judging them for their evil sins. It isn’t just Egypt. It is everyone.

Conclusion

All nations rise. All nations fall. God is the cause of both. Some have already fallen. Others are still to fall in the future. In Ezekiel’s day, neither Edom nor Sidon nor Egypt had yet fallen. Assyria, Elam, and Meshesh-Tubal had. The overwhelming consensus is that all these oracles were fulfilled historically in the Babylonian period, yet with ongoing spiritual/typological significance for how God judges proud nations and the powers of chaos behind them even into our day. This makes it a warning then, not only to long-gone superpowers, but to all the nations of today. There is even a warning here to those who call themselves Christians (though not the elect).

Even God’s people—at least in name—have often acted in prideful boasts. Israel in Amos’ day said, “Have we not by our own strength captured Karnaim for ourselves?” (Amos 6:13). Jerusalem, emulating Nineveh emulating God himself said, “I am, and there is no one beside me” (Isa 47:8, 10).

After Jesus told them they were slaves to sin, The Pharisees said, “We are offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone” (John 8:33, 39). The church at Laodicea said, “I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing” (Rev 3:17).

Later on, Roman Catholic Bishops will make great boasts. Several popes have said things such as, “We declare, say, define, and pronounce that it is absolutely necessary for salvation that every human creature be subject to the Roman Pontiff” (Boniface VIII (*Unam Sanctam* 1302). Or, “The Pope can be judged by no one on earth ... He alone can depose emperors and kings” (Gregory VII, *Dicatus Papae* 1075). Or, “The Pope is not only the representative of Jesus Christ, but he is Jesus Christ himself, hidden under the veil of the flesh” (Leo XIII, *The Great Encyclical Letters of Pope Leo XIII*). What happens to those who make such boasts in defiance of God? They go down to Sheol, to the darkest recesses of the pit.

And what about America? How about Obama’s, “We are the ones we’ve been waiting for. We are the change that we seek.” How about Clinton’s, “We are the indispensable nation” (coined by Madeleine Albright). How about Bush Sr, “This is America ... Holy Name, a brilliant diversity

spreads like stars, like a thousand points of light in a broad and peaceful sky” (Acceptance Speech, 1988). How about Trump, “Nobody knows more about _____ than I do, maybe in the history of the world.” Our recent leadership is truly filled with narcissists from both parties. Sure, some of it could be chocked off as political rhetoric. But then again, isn’t that what how a PR firm would spin the words of Babylon or Egypt too?

God’s Word to Ezekiel is both relevant and timeless. All the nations will be judged by God, so that all may know that he is the LORD. There is only one holy nation, and that is Christ’s church, and there is only leader of it and that is Christ himself. But because of the overwhelming grace of God, we also know from Nineveh and Nebuchadnezzar that when even the pagan nations **repent** and turn back to the LORD whom they have forgotten, that they will likely enjoy his blessing. For a time. Until a new generation forgets and refuses to repent. That’s the ultimate word to the nations of our day and to Christ’s visible church. In Christ, there is always forgiveness for those who humble themselves. But in Christ, there is also the Divine Warrior who slayed the Dragon. What fool would believe that he will therefore spare them?

Bibliography

- Heiser, Michael S. “Naked Bible Podcast Transcript: Episode 146 Ezekiel 32.” *Naked Bible Podcast* (Feb 18, 2017).
- Hesiod. *Works and Days*.
- Lewis, Theodore J. “[CT 13.33-34 and Ezekiel 32: Lion-Dragon Myths](#).” *JAOS* 116:1 (Jan-Mar 1996): 28-47.
- Van Dorn, Douglas. *Giants: Sons of the gods Tenth Anniversary Revised and Expanded*. Dacono, CO: Waters of Creation Pub., 2023.
- Zimmerli, Walther. Frank Moore Cross, and Klaus Baltzer. *Ezekiel: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel, Hermeneia—a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979–).