

Earth's Proud Empires Pass Away

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[0 : 0 0] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. So do you have that open in front of you? And like last week, we're going to do something of a summary of these chapters. So I'll lead us through something of an overview of Ezekiel 29 to 32.

So with these chapters, we're coming to the second half of an eight-chapter section of oracles of judgments against the nations, given mostly during the time of the siege of Jerusalem.

And it is all focused on just one nation in these chapters. Chapters 29 to 32 are focused on Egypt. So 29 verse 1.

[2 : 1 2] Now Egypt gets such a big focus, no doubt, because it was on her that Judah pinned its hopes for a rescue from the Babylonians.

But no, God was going to give Egypt into the hands of Babylon too. Look down at verse 18. Son of man, Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, made his army labor hard against Tyre.

Every head was made balls and every shoulder was rubbed bare. Yet neither he nor his army got anything from Tyre to pay for the labor that he has performed against her. Therefore, thus says the Lord God, behold, I will give the land of Egypt to Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, and he shall carry off its wealth and despoil it and plunder it.

And it shall be the wages for his army. I have given him the land of Egypt as his payment for which he labored, because they worked for me, declares the Lord God.

And so, chapter 30, Woe a lament for Egypt. Verse 6, her proud might will be brought down.

[4 : 0 8] So that, verse 8, then she will know that I am the Lord. Verse 21, God has broken the arm of Pharaoh.

And instead, verse 24, strengthened the arm of Nebuchadnezzar. And the arms of Pharaoh shall fall. Then they shall know that I am the Lord.

Verse 31, chapter 31, sorry. Chapter 31 then reiterates that Pharaoh and Egypt will fall and be destroyed, just as the mighty Assyrian Empire had been destroyed.

Once it was beautiful in its greatness, verse 7. The greatest of all the trees in the garden of God. But, verse 10, thus says the Lord God, because it towered high and set its tops amongst the clouds, and its heart was proud of its height, God destroyed it by the hands of another nation, Babylon.

And so it will be for proud Egypt. Look at verse 18. Whom are you? 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.

[5 : 24] You shall lie among the uncircumcised, with those who are slain by the sword. This is Pharaoh. And all his multitude declares the Lord God.

Chapter 32 records the lament for Egypt, verse 2. Have a look. 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. 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.

See, God will use Babylon as his instrument of judgment. Verse 11. The swords 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. And down in verse 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.

[6 : 50] Whom do you surpass in beauty? Go down and be laid to rest with the uncircumcised. An ignominious end for the mighty king, revered by the nations in his time.

He too goes down to the pit to join all the other long list of rulers and nations that God has judged that fill the chapter. Look down to verse 32 at the end of chapter 32.

He who spread terror in the land of the living, he shall be laid to rest among the uncircumcised, with those who are slain by the sword.

Pharaoh and all his multitudes declares the Lord God. Well, amen. This is God's word.

We'll do turn up, if you would, Ezekiel chapter 29. And as Paul said, we're looking at these four chapters.

[7 : 59] All about the seventh nation that God's prophet Ezekiel pronounces judgments on in this central section of the book.

And Egypt gets half of that whole section, seven oracles all to itself. Why such a great focus on Egypt? Well, very likely because it was to Egypt and Egypt's power that Israel so often turned for help, turned for succor in its quest for earthly security among the nations in these days in which Ezekiel lived.

But I think there's also a symbolic aspect to it because the great quest to seek help from Egypt goes right back to the very beginning of Israel's story, way back in Genesis.

Do you remember how when we were looking at Genesis, back in Genesis chapter 12, when Abraham had only just got himself settled in the promised land, he was tempted away to flee to Egypt.

And it nearly led to complete disaster. So seeking Egypt's help is almost parabolic in the Bible for seeking any power and help and security beyond trusting in God's covenant promise alone.

[9 : 19] Now the date here in verse 1 of chapter 29 is about a year into the siege of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar's army. And because Pharaoh and Egypt had expansionist plans to the north, up into Palestine, Judah had hopes that the advance-up of Pharaoh would scare off the Babylonians and would save them.

But in Jerusalem, God's prophet Jeremiah had said very clearly, no, not so. You can read about it in Jeremiah chapter 37. He said, yes, the Babylonians have retreated at first, but they will come back and they will both rout the Egyptians and they will destroy you.

And even if you were to defeat them all, said Jeremiah, leaving only bedridden wounded men in their tents, they will still destroy you.

But we're told in that chapter of Jeremiah, neither the king nor his servants nor the people of the land listened to the words of the Lord that he had spoken.

They knew better than God's prophet and God's word. Astonishing, isn't it, really? What an abiding characteristic that is, even in the church of God right to this very day.

[10 : 35] People so often think that they know better than the word of God, the word that's spoken to them by experienced and wise people.

But that's the human heart. And that's the way it is, even within God's household. Because God's people, whether in Ezekiel's day or in our own day, we too often have far too small a view of God's sovereignty.

Our horizons are far too truncated. People think only in terms, so often of God and me, God and my life, or God and our church, and our little realm, as though somehow God was interested only in these little things and our little arenas.

As though somehow these things were sealed and separated off from God's affairs with the whole world, with the whole nations of this world, with the empires, with this whole wide world.

Of course God's focus is, and it's always been, on his people, on his church. But his focus on his church has always been from the very start for the future of this whole wide world.

[11 : 46] God has a far, far bigger canvas that he's painting on than we can ever imagine. And God has far more extraordinary ways of working than we find, well, easy to cope with often.

And he tells Israel, indeed, he tells other nations, that Nebuchadnezzar, this ruthless king of Babylon, that he is working for me. Nebuchadnezzar, my servant, I will send against this land, is what he says to Israel through Jeremiah.

Jeremiah 25, verse 9. And he will use him, Nebuchadnezzar, to punish not only Judah, but all the other nations who ally themselves to Judah and to Egypt.

And all of those who seek protection from Egypt will find God's hand against them. It's God who is sovereign over world events and world empires.

And he is ultimately beyond all the shifts that we see in the balance of power in history. It is I who by my great power and my outstretched arm made the earth with the men and all the animals on it.

[13 : 04] And I will give it to whomever it seems right to me. And now I have given all these lands into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, my servant.

That's what God says to his people in Jeremiah 27, and verse 6. And I can tell you that was as shocking, that was as unpalatable to Israel and all her allies in the world then as it would be today if God declared to every western country that leans on the United States for power and for security, I have given the land of Ukraine into the hands of Vladimir Putin, my servant, to teach you and NATO and the whole western world a very big lesson in humility.

That would be pretty shocking, wouldn't it? But the Lord went on through Jeremiah to Jerusalem and to all the other nations, if you do not submit to Babylon and serve them, I myself will destroy you.

As indeed, I will in time judge Babylon. And God says that many nations and kings will come and make him their slave. And indeed, that is what happened.

Persia, under Cyrus, came and subdued Babylon. And God also called Cyrus, king of Persia, my anointed servant. We find that very difficult, I think, but don't doubt that God's arm is at work behind all history, sometimes in the most surprising of ways.

[14 : 42] Now perhaps Ezekiel's hearers did still doubt that, maybe because all that God had prophesied against Tyre, remember that we saw last week, it hadn't yet come to pass fully. If you look at verse 17 of chapter 29 here, you notice the date given there is some 16 years after the date in verse 1 of chapter 29.

It's actually the latest date in the whole book of Ezekiel. It comes about two years later than the very last oracles that we find in chapters 40 to 48, some 16 years after the siege of Jerusalem when all of these other oracles we're looking at in these chapters were delivered.

And it's the only one that comes in the whole book that's out of chronological order. But it must be placed here for a reason. Nebuchadnezzar had besieged Tyre, in fact, for over 13 years.

He had subjugated it, but he never completely destroyed it and got hold of all its treasure as God said ultimately would be lost to Tyre. But this oracle is here, you see, in verses 17 to 21 to remind people that there's always more to what God is doing than we realize.

The mills of God grind slowly, but they do grind exceedingly fine. You see, God takes the long view. Tyre is not the only nation that God is dealing with and judging.

[16 : 08] And so his full settlement for Tyre can wait. And in fact, it was much later under Alexander the Great of Greece that Tyre was totally destroyed and its wealth removed. But meantime, you see, God has other work for his servant Nebuchadnezzar.

And what we find here is that God pays his workmen properly. Verse 18 said that for everything that Nebuchadnezzar did to Tyre with his army, he got very little for his army. So God says in verse 20, I've given him the land of Egypt for his payment for which he labored because he worked for me.

And God won't be any man's debtor. And verse 21 you see there at the end of the chapter is a reminder that Ezekiel's words from his lips will be vindicated. God is not slow to judge as we judge it, but God works according to his timetable, not ours.

And he fulfills his promises his way. And sometimes that's rather different than what we've come to expect. Actually, that's a reminder particularly to those who might read biblical prophecy in a very wooden way, in an over-literalistic way.

God is not nearly as tied to our over-literalistic expectations as we can sometimes be. It's just a little corrective. But the point here is yes, God will judge the tires of this world, the pride, the wealth, the prosperity of these kind of cultures.

[17 : 35] But not only that, God will also judge the pride of imperial delusion, of nations that have delusions of grandeur about their own power and their own invincibility and their own military might, which have God-like pretensions because of that.

And that, you see, was epitomized in those days in this land and empire of Egypt. Let's try and get clear then, just on the main message of these four chapters, that we're to understand and see from these oracles of judgment on this great imperial power, Egypt.

First of all, in chapter 29, verses 1 to 16, what we're given here is a vivid picture of demonic delusion. Demonic delusion. Every imperial delusion is ultimately demonic.

demonic. Verses 3 to 9 here, they picture Pharaoh like the Nile crocodile, the great beast, the king of the great river of Egypt, from which all Egypt's power stemmed in terms of its wealth, its fertility, even its military power.

Verse 3, my Nile is my own. But you see, God's view is more revealing. Look at verse 3. Pharaoh, he says, is the great dragon in the midst of his streams.

[19 : 01] That is, he is but a local manifestation of the dark forces of evil and chaos that oppose God and that have pretensions of rule against God, and yet actually they're just creatures of God and ultimately always under his power and control.

The dragon is a common image in the Bible. Sometimes it's called Leviathan, the monster of the waters, as in Psalm 74 verse 13 or in Job very often.

Sometimes it's called Rahav, the dragon, as in Isaiah 51 verse 9, where it's referring to God's overcoming of him and overruling of him in the Red Sea when he caused him to flee in the time of the Exodus.

It's just another name for the serpent. Isaiah 27 verse 1, the fleeing serpent, the twisting serpent, the dragon, whom the Lord will ultimately utterly destroy at last on the great day when he ushers in the new creation.

And every manifestation in human history of the tyranny of imperial delusion is a manifestation of the dragon, of the serpent himself, seeking whom he may devour.

[20 : 15] But he will always, in the end, be humbled, be humiliated. And verses 4 and 5 hear tell of a great crocodile being hunted and humiliated and left as carrion for scavenging beasts and birds.

Psalm 74 verse 14 says, In days of old you crushed the head of Leviathan. You gave him as food for the creatures of the wilderness. And so it would be here with Pharaoh, with the demonic manifestation of that dark power in his day.

And indeed so it is. In every age, as Martin Luther sang, the tyrants of this age struck briefly on the stage. Their sentence has been passed at the bar of God.

And so it's been from the beginning the demonic force of the serpent has been sowing delusion from the very beginning. He's the father of lies, says Jesus.

He promotes delusions of grandeur. Adam was deceived, wasn't he? Seeking deity to be as gods. What did he reap? Disaster and judgment. You read on in Genesis as human civilization begins to flourish.

[21 : 29] Again, there are pretensions of power and might and it leads to all kinds of ultimate evil. It finds its judgment again in the flood. Then again, it rears its head.

Afterwards, people wanting to mass themselves together to become like gods, building a tower all the way up to heaven to unite as their own god here on earth.

And God judges at Babel. And our history has seen repeated cycles of this imperial delusion, this power-seeking that leads to tyranny in the end and behind it all, always, is the dragon.

But God will judge every manifestation of it. There are two charges against Egypt here in this chapter. First, in verses 6 to 9, the charge is that Egypt has been an unreliable and a dangerous crutch for God's people, a staff of reed, which instead of helping her just hurts her, tears her apart.

Secondly, in verses 9 to 12, Egypt has just lapped up this delusion of grandeur. Not only does Pharaoh say, oh, the Nile is mine, but you see, he says, I made it.

[22 : 45] He thinks he is the creator God. Like in verse 3, I made it, he says, for myself. I am the center of the world. I am the maker. I am the Lord. It's all for me.

And therefore, says the Lord in verse 10, I am against you. You'll judge Egypt. Although, if you notice verse 13, there is a ray of hope for Egypt's future, but only, notice, by humbling a lowly kingdom, verse 14, the most lowly, never again exalted or ruling, never again able to be a snare to Israel.

There is hope, even those who are deluded by demonic pride and arrogance, but only when such pride is ultimately broken. and the lesson for God's people, well, it's clear, isn't it?

It's always folly to seek security from this world and not from the Lord. Woe to those, says Isaiah in chapter 31, woe to those who go down to Egypt for help because they are very strong, but do not look to the Holy One of Israel.

And the New Testament is just as strong in that warning to us, isn't it? Love not the world which is passing away, which is under the power of the evil one, says the Apostle John.

[24 : 11] No, it's the one who seeks and does the will of God who abides forever. It's a warning, isn't it, to the church, a warning to all Christians. And of course, it's also a warning to our world and to all its empires and rulers.

Imperial delusion is very, very dangerous. Even great dragons, the greatest, cannot escape the hook of the Lord.

And so verse, chapter 30, you see, describes, secondly, the day of destruction. And it's a reminder that every earthly power will meet its own day of reckoning.

And for Egypt, verse 3, that day was very near. Not only would there be no salvation for Judah from Egypt, verse 4, a sword would rout Egypt.

And, notice verse 5, all of those who ally themselves with Egypt. Verses 7 to 9 describe the fall of all her allies, don't they?

[25 : 22] And verses 10 to 12, the fall of Egypt's armies. And verse 13, all her idols. And in verses 14 and 15, all her cities. I will execute judgments on Egypt.

And verse 19, then they will know that I am the Lord. So there will be no hope from that quarter at all for Judah.

And note that, verse 10, God brings his judgment through his instrument, the hand of Nebuchadnezzar.

But also, verse 12, by his own direct instruction, he's going to dry up the Nile, so he'll devastate the land, therefore, with famine and fires and so on.

You see, what we're being told is God is sovereign over nations and over nature. And it's just utter folly to think that any human power can set itself above him in either of these realms.

[26 : 29] Jesus told us plainly, didn't he, that there will be wars and there will be rumors of wars. There will be nation rising against nation, kingdom against kingdom and so on. And all of this is just the birth pains of the beginning of his heavenly kingdom marching towards its denouement.

He is sovereign over all of these things. So we needn't fear these things. And we certainly shouldn't get drawn into seeking this earth's solution from the fools who think that they've got the power to either control nations or control nature.

Every such earthly power is deluded and it will face its reckoning. It will be shown up to be powerless and deluded. The United Nations, the World Health Organization, the World Economic Forum and so on, they all think that they have a divine-like power to bring solutions to this world.

But what we see so quickly is that apparent cooperation in these things so quickly leads to control and coercion and corruption. Godless power corrupts.

We see it in the right and proper desire for conservation in the natural world, but so quickly that leads to corruption, to cultism. The Green Movement today is a religious movement.

[27 : 55] It's an increasingly anti-human movement, an anti-God movement. top of the agenda are things promoting death, wanting to spread more and more and more abortion, more and more and more end-of-life, euthanasia, more and more deceitful and destructive ideology, destructive to the human person.

That's what we're seeing in all the pushing of the trans and all that stuff. And it's the rising power, isn't it, in our Western world today? But every such power will meet its day of reckoning.

Its arm will be broken. Just as verses 20 to 26 here speak about Pharaoh's arm being broken. And the more deified and the more proud such power will be, the greater that humbling will be.

Verse 22, both Pharaoh's arms will be broken. And the sword is going to fall completely from his hand. And what we're told here is that God's arm is actually behind every strong arm in the world.

Notice that God breaks Pharaoh's arm, but verse 25, he strengthens the king of Babylon's arm. Just as in the end, ultimately Babylon's power will also be destroyed.

[29 : 13] So you'd be fools to throw all your trust in that direction as well. You see, that too would be a delusion. It's only the hand of the Lord himself that you can trust to truly save God's people.

And it's important for us to remember, isn't it, as Christians, that God does use and God will use earthly powers. He will even use ruthless and godless powers as instruments of his justice in this world.

Enemies of the gospel, enemies of the church may well be cut down to size by them, but that does not mean that they are therefore friends of God and friends of the gospel. We've got to be very careful, haven't we, from thinking that our enemy's enemy must therefore be our friend.

No, that is not so. Mustn't be naive, must we? No earthly power, no nations, no political party, no economic policy, or anything else can be the hope in which God's people put all their future hopes in.

We might rejoice reasonably when God does use some of these things to further his cause and his people, but we must never forget that it's only the arm of the Lord, only the arm of the Lord that is strong to save.

[30 : 33] You have a mighty arm, says the psalmist. Strong in your hand, high in your right hand, is salvation. It's his right hand, it's his holy arm alone that works salvation.

And God, by his arm, works that salvation in a way that is in the very opposite way of the world's understanding of power and might. Perhaps one of the most astonishing revelations of the power of the arm of the Lord is that spoken of by the prophet Isaiah in Isaiah chapter 53.

When he says things there, it's so astonishing. He says, no one's going to believe what we say when the Lord, quote, bears his holy arm before the eyes of the nations and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God.

Because his arm is not bared like Pharaoh's or like Nebuchadnezzar's to take and to make suffer and to subdue and to crush. His strong arm, Isaiah says there, is bared to give, to suffer for, to be crushed, to be wounded himself in order to bring life and not death, in order to bring salvation and not destruction to his people.

That's why Isaiah says there's good news to shout to Jerusalem when God comes with might, when his arm rules for him. Because he says there in Isaiah chapter 40, that arm will gather his flocks in his arms.

[32 : 03] That arm will carry them in his bosom and gently lead those who are with young. What a contrast that is, the arm of the Lord to every earthly empire and its power.

What a contrast to every imperial delusion of the power of human rule. And that, you see, is why ultimately every earthly power and empire will be laid in the dust of history.

And must be laid in the dust of death. So that the light and the life of God's eternal empire will fill this earth as the waters cover the sea.

And that is what's pictured, you see, in chapters 31 and 32 here. It's the end of all human pride, all human power, all human pretension. These chapters picture for us, don't they, the darkness of death.

And the message is absolutely unmistakable. All human pride in all its manifestations ends only in one place. And that is the pit of hell. See, what happened in that specific time in history is a microcosm of the whole story of history and all its empires.

[33 : 16] and of the ultimate end of all history and of all humanity. And that's why, again, we have in chapter 31 all these references to Eden and all the imagery of the trees with these great nations pictured as a great cosmic tree representing the world of men, but ultimately being felled and consigned to the darkness of death.

Verse 3 there where it mentions Assyria. Scholars argue a bit over that, whether it really is Assyria or whether the text should be amended so that God's speaking directly to Egypt.

Behold, I liken you, that is Egypt, to a cedar. I think most likely it is Assyria here that's been spoken about because that was the previous dominant empire of the world.

In fact, it was the most violent, the most ruthless of all the ancient empires. And the point I think is, you see in verse 2, God addresses Pharaoh, king of Egypt and his multitude.

Or that word multitude could read his pomp and power. This is Pharaoh and his pomp and power. And what he's saying is, who are you like in greatness? You consider yourselves perhaps as great as Assyria once was.

[34 : 29] Well, look what happened to Assyria, that ruthless nation. Verse 12, foreigners, the most ruthless of nations have cut it down.

And you know that. It's been left, felled, broken. And all the great trees, says verse 14, shall be given over to death, to the world below, to the pit.

And so, verse 18, do you see, when you think that you're not like that, when you thus lie in glory and greatness among the trees in Eden, where do you think you are?

He's addressing Egypt. You likewise will be brought down to the world below. And this is Pharaoh in all his pomp and power, declares the Lord.

See the point? Assyria, the previous empire, Egypt, the current one, in fact, also Babylon, the future one, they will all be given over to death. Verse 14, they'll all go to the world below among the children of man.

[35 : 35] Literally, the children of Adam, those who are made of dust, Adamah, those who go down to the pit under God's curse. That's what lying among the circumcised and those who are slain by the sword means in verse 18, under God's curse.

And all that imagery from Eden in verse 18 and in verses 3 to 9, in fact, about the trees in the garden of God, they're reminding us. They're reminding us that rule on earth, that empire on earth, is not wrong of itself because God created mankind and put him in Eden to rule the world for him.

But, it's human corruption, it's abuse, it's pride, it's hubris that leads to that nemesis. Look at verse 10, it towered high, its heart was proud in its height.

But, verse 14, no trees, no earthly power will be allowed to reach up to the clouds of heaven to become God-like.

They will be felled. As Christopher Wright puts it, from majesty to the mire, from the height of perfection to the pit of hell. As verse 15 says here, you see, all the smaller trees, the lesser nations, fainted because of it.

[36 : 54] All the other nations crake at the fall of this great power, says verse 16, because if this happens to the great power, well, what's going to happen to us? We relied on them for our security, for our prosperity.

We held her currency, we held her government bonds as our reserves, but now we're all going to be taken down with her. And yes, look at verse 17, they also went down to shale with it.

Those who lived under its shadow among the nations. Well, that's just reality, isn't it? That's just history. Smaller nations have always had to seek protection from larger powers, from alliances with them, but when this ends of history shift decisively, when geopolitics moves along, well, they very quickly expire.

And in fact, they've so often in history been shown to place their hopes for security in the branches of a tree that one day just comes crashing down. And it's a picture, isn't it, of total exposure, total reversal.

The first, shall we last, is how Jesus put it. And indeed, Jesus himself tells us, doesn't he, that the ultimate judgment on the nations will be, as exactly these prophecies foreshadow.

[38 : 23] All the tribes of the earth will mourn, says Jesus, and they will see the Son of Man seated and coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory when he comes to bring ultimate judgment to every nation of this world.

And in fact, it's exactly the language used here of going down into the pit under God's judgment that's picked up so vividly by the Apostle John in his revelation in chapter 20 where he sees the dragon, that ancient serpent called the devil or Satan, thrown into the pit and all who were deceived by him to oppose God all with him.

Do you see? That's what this coming judgment on Egypt so clearly foreshadows. And that's so clear in chapter 32 where again, if you look, you'll see the image of the dragon appears again.

And where you'll see the language is apocalyptic. It's cosmic language in its tone. If you look at the dating, verse 1 of chapter 32, it tells us that this oracle comes sometime after the news of Jerusalem's final fall has actually reached the exiles in Babylon.

You can compare it with chapter 33, verse 21. So they know now that there is absolutely no hope of deliverance coming from Egypt. And Egypt's doom is foretold here in certain ways.

[39 : 47] Already the lament is being sung, verse 2. Raise a lament over Pharaoh, the king of Egypt. And notice, you consider yourself, he says, a lion.

You think you're divine, but no. You're demonic. You're like a dragon of the seas. You bring only trouble to this world. You foul the waters that you inhabit.

And so judgment is pronounced on him. And look at the cosmic terms here in verse 7. The darkening of the sun and the moon and the stars. Verse 10, appalling the whole world, making all tremble for their lives on the day of Eury down for.

As well they might, verse 12. Because the sword of the king of Babylon that comes to destroy that empire is being swung ultimately by whom?

Well, by God himself. I will cause your multitude to fall. To bring ruin to the pride of Egypt.

[40 : 52] And look at verse 16. There's a great air of finality about it, isn't there? This is the lamentation that shall be chanted. It's already written. They shall chant it.

And that is how it will be, friends, for every power of this world. As we sang, earth's proud empires all will pass away. That's the constant witness of Scripture.

Listen to another prophet, Isaiah. Isaiah chapter 2. For the Lord of hosts has a day set apart against all that is proud and lofty, against all that is lifted up, and it shall be brought low.

All the haughtiness of man shall be humbled, and the lofty proud of man shall be brought low, and the Lord alone will be exalted in that day. They will enter the caverns of the rocks and the cliffs from before the terror of the Lord.

And so he warns, stop regarding man in whose nostrils is breath, for of what account is he? Kings and presidents and prime ministers and rulers of all kinds should meditate on those words often, shouldn't they?

[42 : 14] And so should we. This year we'll see elections, won't they, in so many countries and nations around the world? Well, stop regarding man in whose nostrils is breath.

What account is he? The final oracle from verse 17 to the end of chapter 32 is just a salutary reminder, isn't it, to all the world and to all its people.

All nations, all powers arrayed against God, whether they're great or they're small, will be consigned to the pit of destruction. So verse 18, Egypt sent down to the world below, to the pit.

Even the mightiest chiefs will call out from the midst of Sheol, verse 21, from the abode of the dead. It's a picture of utter humiliation.

Verse 19, what was once unsurpassed in beauty is now buried among the cursed, the uncircumcised. And Egypt will find there all the others who were once great.

[43 : 22] You see, verse 22, Assyria, consigned to the uttermost parts of the pit, humbled even in hell, it seems. And all the rest of them are there, too. All the other nations that we read about that were arrayed against God and His people in chapters 25 to 28.

There's Elan, verse 24. There's Meshech, verse 26. There's Edom, verse 29. There's Sidon, and there's all the rest of them. And when Pharaoh sees that he, too, has come to join them, verse 31, well, our version says he'll be comforted.

But really, that form of the word would be better translated. He'll be sorry. He'll rue it. He'll regret. He'll suffer grief. It's the same word that's there in chapter 31, verse 16.

He will then know that I am the Lord. That's the refrain, isn't it, all the way through these chapters.

Pharaoh and every other one will face inescapable ruin and the inescapable reality of the truth that he has scorned and the consequences, therefore, of that sin.

[44 : 37] As Alec Mateer puts it, Pharaoh is consigned to an eternally unassuaged sorrow. You see, to know that you've been wrong about absolutely everything in life, despite having been warned repeatedly, and to know that the calamity that you now experience is all your own fault, and to know that you are now beyond all possibility of repentance, and therefore beyond all possibility of any hope, to know that, to know that God's judgment is real, and to know that God's judgment is just.

That is what Revelation chapter 20 describes, I think, as being tormented day and night forever and ever. That is to experience eternal hell.

God's God's God's God's message is clear. They are not yet beyond repentance.

There is hope for them, but not ever from turning to the powers of this world, which are all ultimately under God's judgment, but only by turning wholeheartedly to the one true and living God, to the Lord, who alone can save them and help them.

But you see, as is so often the case with all of us, it's only when God brings us utterly to an end of ourselves, and when he shows us sometimes brutally how weak our mortality is, how feeble our morality is, how foolish all our misplaced loyalties are, it's only then, isn't it, that when we're brought to the place that we are utterly humbled enough that we can hear his voice and begin to find that true hope.

[46 : 44] And that was certainly true, you see, for Ezekiel's exiles, it was only when they finally digested that God had allowed everything that they held precious to be destroyed, their city, their land, their temple, everything, and that there was no possibility of them being able to overcome this themselves, there was no hope from any other quarter, which is what all these oracles against the nations in these chapters we've been looking at are about.

It was only then, wasn't it, that God could begin to speak to them the words of hope through his prophet Ezekiel about God's future, his way, that filled the rest of his prophecy.

It was only when the bottom fell out of their world that the wax fell out of their ears, and they could just begin to hear God's voice again. Isn't that often the case with us too?

My father often used to quote a saying of Martin Luther where he said, God made the world out of nothing, and not until we are nothing can he do anything with us. It's painful, isn't it?

Sometimes very painful to be cut down to nothing, to be exposed like that for what we really are, that we're not the divine lion of our life that we thought we were, but actually we're captive under a demonic delusion.

[48 : 20] And to see, because of that, the inevitable day of destruction looming, to have to face up to that darkness, death, and that may even be for some facing up to the darkness of death itself, but that may be what it takes to bring us to our day of decision.

And that's the final thing. That is what God was doing for his people then through Ezekiel. That's what his word is always doing even still today. God brings us back time after time to confront us each day with the day of decision.

to teach us that there are only two ways to know the Lord. There is the way of judgment, to know him as Pharaoh did, and grim remorse of eternal death.

Or there is the way of genuine repentance. And that alone is the way to life, to eternal life. There is a way of real hope.

There is a way of a real future. Remember these verses that we looked at at the end last week that come right at the very heart of all of these chapters of judgment. Look at chapter 28 verses 25 and 26 again.

[49 : 38] Verses 25 and 26 of chapter 28 right at the center of all of these judgments show us the future that God wants for his people. For everyone who will trust and turn to him and live.

For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, says the Lord. So turn and live. Remember, there is a way back. There's a way back to God from the dark paths of sin. There's a way into life, into light, into blessing.

There's a way to building homes, to planting vineyards, to dwelling securely with him forever and ever. That is what God wants. But that way is only his way.

It can never be the way of the world. God. If these chapters here that we've been looking at, these grim chapters, if they teach us anything, they underline in triplicate that all human power, all human philosophy, all human pretensions, all human pride are utterly transient.

It will perish, all of it, even the greatest, it will go down to the pit. So put not your trust in princes, says the psalmist, or in presidents, or in any politicians, or in any power or philosophy of this world, in whom there is no salvation.

[51 : 05] But there is one that we can trust, one who is truly sovereign over all history, over all humanity. And just as he has pulled down the might of all proud empires throughout history, so he will ultimately cast all such.

Well, he'll do to them as he did to Egypt. What God says of Egypt in chapter 30, verse 6, will be true of this whole wide world of exploitation and evil.

Her pride shall come down, and all who support her shall fall. They'll be exposed as having been aligned not with a great lion, not with a noble ruler, but rather with a great dragon, with the devil himself.

It was all a demonic delusion. All the power, all the pomp, all the prestige, all the promise, all of that leads only in the end to one place, to the pit of hell.

The whole world lies under the power of the evil one, says John. God, all the Son of God appeared to destroy the works of the devil, and to rescue to himself all who will turn to him and to live.

[52 : 29] And they will know on that day of judgment, when he executes judgments on all who treat him with contempt, they will know that I am the Lord.

And those who do turn to him and trust him and come to be his will know that he is the Lord, their God, their Savior. God's name will be known in this world 15 times through these chapters.

That refrain comes again and again. But you see, that is a call to decision. Every day is a call to decision. Because the question is, will you know that name like Pharaoh, with the grim jealousy of eternal regret, or will you know that name as the great joy of eternal redemption?

God tells us again and again through Ezekiel what he wants. I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, he says. Turn and live. The same God said those words in a different way.

in person on this earth as God the Son incarnate. He said, whoever comes to me, I will never cast out. For I came down from heaven not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me.

[53 : 54] And this is the will of my Father. Everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life. And I will raise him up on the last day.

Up to the glory of his kingdom, not down to the pit of destruction. Ezekiel's gospel is Christ's gospel.

It's the word of the Lord. And it brings every one of us every day, today, as every day, to that day of decision.

Which will it be for each of us. May God help us to have open ears and open hearts and to hear his word today. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, we thank you that you are the one in whose hands this whole world is held. And at whose throne this whole world will be judged.

[54 : 58] And we pray, Lord, that on that great day, we will be among those who know you with the great joy of eternal redemption. So hear us.

Draw near to us. And help us to hear your voice this day. For we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.