

**Robert Vannoy, Major Prophets, Lecture 26--Ezekiel #2
Ezekiel 30 – Prophecy against Egypt [Memphis and Thebes]**

Ezekiel 30:13 Prophecy Against Egypt [Memphis]

Let's go further to Ezekiel chapter 30. Verse 13, "This is what the Sovereign LORD says: 'I will destroy the idols and put an end to the images in Memphis. No longer will there be a prince in Egypt, and I will spread fear throughout the land. I will lay waste Upper Egypt, set fire to Zoan and inflict punishment on Thebes. I will pour out my wrath on Pelusium, the stronghold of Egypt, and cut off the hordes of Thebes. I will set fire to Egypt; Pelusium will writhe in agony. Thebes will be taken by storm; Memphis will be in constant distress.'"

So when we go further in verse 13, we read, "I will destroy the idols and put an end to the images in Memphis. No longer will there be a prince in Egypt." Memphis was a great Egyptian city, a very ancient city. If you go back in Egyptian history, when Menes combined Upper and Lower Egypt in about 3000 B.C., he built a new capital city, and he called it Memphis. So the history of Memphis goes back to about 3000 B.C. as the first capital city of a united Egypt. It was one of the most ancient and important cities of Egypt throughout Egyptian history. It was either the capital or one of the most important cities from 3000 B.C. on.

Here Ezekiel comes along and says, "I will destroy the idols and will cause their images to cease from Memphis." That is a rather remarkable prediction. It is like saying in the time of the Roman Empire that I will cause all the idols and images to cease from Rome. Rome is full of them even until today. It is a remarkable prediction.

Prince From Egypt

But then the verse goes on and saying, "There will be no more a prince of Egypt." The King James says "prince of the land of Egypt." So literally it is a prince from the land of Egypt when looking at the Hebrew translation. I'm not sure why the King James

translated it “of,” and if you look at the NIV the RSV, and even the New American Standard, they all say “a prince in the land of Egypt.” There must have been hundreds of princes in the land of Egypt since the time Ezekiel made that prophesy. I think it is more correct to read it “*from* the land of Egypt.” The idea is that a prince from the land of Egypt shall not continue to be or to rule. We looked at the same construction in Isaiah 4 where it says, “They will learn war no more.” Does that mean never again will they learn war, or does it mean lack of continuation? I think it is lack of continuation that is meant here. And a prince “from the land of Egypt will not continue to be” doesn’t necessarily mean no more forever, but “there will not continue to be a prince from the land of Egypt.” Let us look historically to see what happens.

Brief History of Princes Over Egypt

Nebuchadnezzar conquered the Egyptians as chapter 30, verses 10 and 11, prophecy. He put Babylonians there to rule in Egypt. But not many years later, the Babylonians were conquered by the Persians. The Persians put Persian rulers in Egypt. They ruled for a couple centuries, and then Alexander the Great moves eastward and he conquers the Persian Empire and puts Greek rule in Egypt. Alexander dies and his Empire breaks up into four parts. Ptolemy, Alexander’s general, seizes part of the Empire that covers Egypt, and he is Greek. So you have Greek rule in Egypt for another period of centuries. The Ptolemies represented themselves as Pharaohs, but they were Greeks. They were not “princes from the land of Egypt.” Over 600 years after the time of Ezekiel, there are no more princes from the land of Egypt. Previous to that, foreign rule was the exception. That brief interlude of the Hyksos rule from 1750 to 1670 B.C. and then about 600 B.C., there was a brief time of Assyrian control. Foreign rule was the exception through the history of Egypt for four millennia.

You can take this further: after Greek rule, the Romans take over Egypt, and they ruled Egypt for about 600 years. Then the Arabs conquered Egypt, and the Arabs ruled Egypt, not native Egyptians. At about 1000 A.D. the Turks take over and rule Egypt up

until 1850. In 1850 Egypt declared its independence, and when they declared independence it was still a Turkish ruler, King Faruk, that was in power and his house continued until the revolution of Nasser in comparably recent times. You could debate that Nasser: is he a “prince from the land from Egypt?” My guess is he is more Arab than Egyptian. Of course Nasser died and was succeeded by Sadat who was killed and then by Mubarak. Again, Mubarak and Sadat are Arab. Maybe we would want to call Sadat, Nasser, and Mubarak Egyptians. But certainly here is a remarkable prophesy: there will no more be a continuation of princes from the land of Egypt. From the point where Ezekiel gives this prophesy, even though there is two millennia of history of native Egyptian rule, you get a succession right up until the present of non-Egyptian rulers in Egypt.

I think Arabs historically would be people who were descended from Ishmael and Esau, and the inter-marriages between the descendants between the two. Egyptians come out of Ham. If you go back into Genesis 10 where you trace the line of descent through the three sons of Noah, the Egyptians would come out of Ham whereas the Arabs would come out of Shem. The Arabs have so intermixed with the native Egyptian population going back historically that it is probably hard to say anymore who is what. I'm not sure of what Nasser, Sadat, and Mubarak are nationality-wise, but it would not surprise me if there is more Arab background to those three individuals than there is native Egyptian. The native Egyptians, the Coptic people, are really native Egyptians. There is a Coptic Church that is not Arab. It is more Greek oriented, but that is more the true native Egyptian lineage, I think, among the Copts than it is among the mass of people there who are more Arab. Arabic is a language that was imported into Egypt. That is not historically the Egyptian language. There have been a lot of changes there.

Ezekiel 30:14-16 Prophecy Against Thebes

Ezekiel chapter 30, verses 14-16: “I will lay waste Upper Egypt, set fire to Zoan, and inflict punishment on Thebes. I will pour out my wrath on Pelusium, the stronghold of Egypt, and cut off the hordes of Thebes. I will set fire to Egypt; Pelusium will writhe in agony. Thebes will be taken by storm; Memphis will be in constant distress.” Now that city of Thebes, the NIV translated it “Thebes,” is a city in Upper Egypt about 500 miles south of Memphis. Upper Egypt is south because it is referring to the upper, or more elevated, region of the Nile River. That city, it says in verse 14, “I will execute judgments in Thebes,” and then in verse 15, “I will cut off the multitude of Thebes.” Now, today, there are two districts, Karnack and Luxor. It is one of the wonders of the world, like a large outdoor museum. If you take a tour to Egypt they will take you to Luxor and Karnack. That city was taken by the Assyrians in 663 B.C. If you look at Nahum 3:8 it says, “Are you better than Thebes?” And of course Nahum is a prophesy against Nineveh. Thebes had already been taken by the Assyrians. Within a few centuries after Ezekiel, in the time of the Ptolemies, that city revolted against the Ptolemaic rule and it was attacked by the Ptolemies, and the people were driven away. The Ptolemies decided that they would not permit it again to function as a major city. Some people were permitted to live there, but it really became a village. In 29 B.C. the Romans attacked the city and it ceased to be inhabited.

Look at chapter 30 verse 16, “I will set fire to Egypt and Pelusium will writhe in agony. Thebes will be taken in storm.” Today the city is a city of ruins. Acres and acres of ruins. But compare that with verse 13 with Memphis. Verse 13, “I will destroy the idols and put an end to the images in Memphis.” It doesn’t say that about Thebes. If Ezekiel had said that about Thebes, it would be demonstrably false. If you go to Thebes, Karnack and Luxor, you see all kinds of images, hundreds of them. When you look at the history of Memphis, however, it is quite a different thing. Memphis continued to be a great city for a thousand years after the time of Ezekiel. It was the capital of the Roman province of Egypt, the seat of the Roman government in Egypt. It was probably full of

images and idols much like Luxor is. But if you go to Memphis today, you don't find any. The question is: "Why?" Historically, what happened was when the Mohammedans conquered all of the Near East, including Egypt; they decided that they would build a new city for their capital in 640 A.D. That new city was Cairo. Cairo was built about 10 miles from Memphis. When it was built, they took the stones from the ruins of Memphis and used them in building the new city of Cairo. They used Memphis like a stone quarry. Memphis all but disappeared. Here is a prophecy again where Ezekiel says, "I will destroy the idols, and put an end to the images in Memphis."

Looking at page 48 of citations, in the middle of the page from the Encyclopedia Britannica, the article on Memphis: "In Hellenistic times the city had a population of 700,000 and a perimeter of 18 miles." That is a big city in the ancient world. "The temple of Hephaestus, as the Greeks called Ptah, enjoyed a great reputation, as did the medical school. With the founding of Alexandria, however, the ruin of both Memphis and Heliopolis had begun. They were destroyed by the Arabs and the Mediaeval builders of Cairo used their ruins as a stone quarry. In modern times hardly anything is left of the great city. Excavations carried out over half a century by Flinders Petrie, many, including the University of Pennsylvania, have recovered scant remains. All that the visitor can see are a few stones among the palm trees and fields, an alabaster sphinx, and a recumbent colossus of Ramses II." Again, a remarkable prophecy of a major city that just disappeared.

Again you have a contrast in this chapter. Thebes remained a place full of images and idols and buildings. It is a remarkable outdoor museum. Memphis just disappeared. If Ezekiel had said that the idols and images would cease from Thebes, he would have been wrong. But he put it the other way around. I don't think Ezekiel knew anything about the rise of Islam and the fact that the Mohammedans would come into Egypt and build Cairo 10 miles from the previous site of Memphis. He doesn't say anything about that. But he does say, "I will destroy the idols and I will cause their images to cease." And that, in

fact, is what happened. Now, certainly the Lord could have predicted the building of Cairo from the ruins of Memphis. But I think you're back into this matter of the character of predictive prophecy where you don't get all the details. It is not like history written after the event. You get enough so that when one is fulfilled you can say, "Yes, this is the fulfillment." But there are elements of information that are not included, and I think that is what we have here.

Thebes and Memphis and Fulfilled Prophecy

The people in Ezekiel's day were told that Nebuchadnezzar would conquer Egypt. And he did that. I think that is evidence of Ezekiel's being a true prophet. But added to that are these statements about Memphis and Thebes that certainly go beyond the possibility of any human expectation or insight. It's not just a clever guess. But it is a statement by Ezekiel through whom God was speaking and to whom God gave specific knowledge of particular things that were going to happen to the Egyptians long-term. So again, I think you have evidence that Ezekiel was a prophet of God and he was speaking for God. And you also have evidence that God is the one who rules and controls history and can tell things in advance before they occur.

These two passages we have looked at in this section on prophecies of judgment against foreign nations are particularly interesting because of their apologetic value. Now, we discussed that theoretically in the first quarter. These are two prophecies that pertain to matters long after any possible question about date of the giving of the prophecy. Subsequent history shows how they were fulfilled.

Next time we'll look at D. on Predictive Prophecy.

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