

THE VALLEY OF DRY BONES

Ezekiel 37:1-14

Westend Bible Chapel

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Ezekiel was a significant figure in the Old Testament of the Bible, known for his prophetic ministry. A quick biography of the prophet Ezekiel:

Birth: Ezekiel, whose name means, “Yahweh is my strength,” was born around 622 BC in Jerusalem, which was part of the Kingdom of Judah.

Background: Ezekiel was born a priest and made a prophet. He lived during a turbulent period in the history of the Israelites. Around the age of twenty-five, he was among the thousands of Jewish people who were exiled from Judah to Babylon in 597 BC, (as the second group of deportees).

Prophetic Calling: Ezekiel's prophetic call came when he was in Babylon.

He had a remarkable encounter with God, described in Ezekiel 1, where he saw a vision of God's glory when he received his divine calling to be a prophet to the exiled Jewish community.

Ministry: Ezekiel's prophetic ministry spanned approximately 22 years, from around 593 BC to 571 BC.

God called him the Watchman. He had the responsibility to convey God's warnings and guidance to the people of Israel, acting as their spiritual guardian and advisor. More than twenty times he says, “*Then you shall know that I am the LORD.*”

He delivered a series of prophetic messages to the Jewish exiles in Babylon, addressing various issues such as their sin of rebellion, idolatry, and the coming judgment upon both the people of Judah and the nations.

Visions and Prophecies: Some of Ezekiel's most well-known prophecies include the vision of the valley of dry bones (Ezekiel 37), the vision of the new temple (Ezekiel 40-48), and his messages regarding the restoration of Israel and God's future blessings.

Death: The Bible does not provide specific details about Ezekiel's death or the circumstances surrounding it. Jewish tradition suggests that he died in Babylon around the age of fifty-two.

Ezekiel's life and work played a crucial role in preserving the spiritual identity of the exiled Jewish community and encouraging them to remain faithful to God during a challenging period in their history. Today, we will be looking at one of the most extraordinary chapters in Ezekiel.

In this chapter Ezekiel sees some dead bones and they come to life right before his eyes. It is a powerful chapter. This passage is relevant to us today.

MAJOR THEMES

This chapter can be summarized with three words. The three words are resurrection, revival, and reunion. Israel is **RESURRECTED** nationally. Israel is **REVIVED** spiritually, and Israel is **REUNITED** politically.

This passage is relevant today, because most churches believe in a doctrine called “*replacement theology*.” They believe that Christians are the spiritual Israel. We are the sons of Abraham by faith; therefore, we are the true Jews today-the spiritual Israel. Not so! They also believe that there is no future for Israel as a nation. Not so!

For those people, we ask them: *What do you do with this chapter?* The whole point of this chapter is that ethnic Israel has a future. It has a future politically and it has a future spiritually.

The hand of the Lord was upon me, and he brought me out in the Spirit of the Lord and set me down in the middle of the valley; it was full of bones. 2And he led me around among them, and behold, there were very many on the surface of the valley, and behold, they were very dry. (37:1-3 ESV).

1. A VISION OF DESOLATION (VERSES 1-2)

What is going on here? Ezekiel is in the Spirit. He has a vision. God takes him, transports him, and places him and right in the middle of a valley.

In the vision, Ezekiel walks around and looks at the valley. Valleys were the place where battles were often fought. Ezekiel tells us what he saw. He saw the remains of the army that lost, the ones who were slain (37:9). This battlefield is full of dead warriors. What is the message of these bones? What do we know about these bones?

The bones were dead, the bones were unburied, the bones were numerous, the bones were scattered, the bones were very dry. They had been there a long time.

It is a morbid picture. Everywhere Ezekiel looks, he sees death. There were no signs of life. This is Death Valley. We will see this is talking about the nation, not individuals. Israel as a nation was dead. It was dead in exile.

What Ezekiel sees, is not a picture of physical death. It is a picture of political death and spiritual desolation, and hopelessness in the form of exile and worldwide dispersion. It is a picture of the Jews scattered among the nations.

For a Jew, unburied bodies, decomposing in the open, was the ultimate degradation. It was a terrible sign of disgrace and shame.

That is what happened to Jews when they were kicked out of their country and lived in other lands. People always looked down on them. They were the outsiders. They were different. No one trusted them. They were persecuted and forced to live in ghettos.

Then he said to me, “*Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel*” (37:11 ESV). The whole chapter is a symbolic chapter, but God interprets the symbols.

These bones do NOT represent the church. They represent Israel, the whole house of Israel. They do not just represent Judah, the two tribes which went into the Babylonian Captivity. They represent all twelve of the tribes of Israel.

These bones do not symbolize dead people. They symbolize a dead nation. The nation died in 586 BC. The Babylonian Captivity began the Times of the Gentiles. Jews were dominated by Gentile powers.

They were dominated by the Babylonians and then the Persians and then the Greeks and then the Romans. They returned to their land but were kicked out again in 70 AD by the Romans and stayed out of it for two thousand years. They did not exist as a nation. They were not reborn as a nation until 1948.

2. A DIVINE DIRECTIVE (VERSES 3-6)

After taking Ezekiel to this valley, God then asks him a question. And he said to me, “***Son of man, can these bones live?***” (37:3 ESV). Ezekiel does not even try to answer the question. He just said, “***O Lord God, you know.*** I do not know but you know.’ Ezekiel did not know what God was doing to do.

Then he said to me, “***Prophecy over these bones, and say to them, O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord*** (37:4 ESV). and later he is commanded to prophecy to the wind (37:9).

The prophet did as he was told , “ ***And as I prophesied, there was a sound, and behold, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone.” 8 And I looked, and behold, there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them. But there was no breath in them.*** (37:7-8 ESV).

3. RESTORATION AND REVIVAL (VERSES 7-14)

A Nation Resurrected (Verses 7-8)

This is a picture of resurrection, not of individual resurrection but national resurrection. Remember, the bones stand for the house of Israel. Israel is scattered among the nations, but the bones suddenly come together, are restored to the land, and form a nation. They are no longer just bones.

This was fulfilled in 1948 when Israel became a nation after two thousand years of not being a nation. Jews now had a homeland. They have a nation. On Friday, May 14, 1948, when David Ben Gurion, Israel's first prime minister, went on the radio and called the new state "Israel."

God promised that he would bring His exiled people back into the Promised Land (37:12). He promised to ***"gather them from all around and bring them to their own land."*** (37:21 ESV). God would call his people out of the graves of the nations (to which they were scattered).

This part of the prophecy has been fulfilled and even Jews recognize this fact. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, when he was speaking at Auschwitz, acknowledged in 2010 that this prophecy of Ezekiel has been fulfilled.

Ezekiel speaks to the bones, and they make a rattling noise and come together but there is one problem. They are physical resurrected, but they are dead. They have no life. There was no breath in them. They have no spirit in them. In 1948, Israel experienced a political national rebirth, but not a spiritual rebirth. They are just dead men and that brings us to the second part of the prophecy, which I entitled *"a nation revived."*

A Nation Revived (Verses 9-10)

Then he said to me, "Prophecy to the breath; prophecy, son of man, and say to the breath, Thus says the Lord GOD: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain, that they may live." ¹⁰ So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived and stood on their feet, an exceedingly great army. (37:9-10 ESV)

Ezekiel gets to watch as he sees these bones, not only come together but come to life and stand up. What does it mean? The nation will not only be regathered and restored to the land, but they will also be regenerated. They will get saved. That has not happened yet, that is still future.

And I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I am the Lord; I have spoken, and I will do it, declares the Lord.” (37:14 ESV).

The remnant of Israel will, at the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, experience a spiritual renewal.

A Nation Reunited (Verses 11-14)

One day, there will be one Jewish kingdom, not two. Israel and Judah will be reunited for good. Ezekiel was told, ***“Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel.***

We are told by God in v 22, ***“And I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel. And one king shall be king over them all, and they shall be no longer two nations, and no longer divided into two kingdoms.” (37:22 ESV).***

Israel as a resurrected nation, a revived nation and a reunited nation is the true context and trust of the passage.

Now how does all this apply to us today?

Let me suggest to you four key lessons based on the facts presented in this passage:

The Power of God's Word

God’s Word has incredible power. When it is preached in the power of the Spirit it makes people rattle, just like the dead bones, it has the power to change things. God's word has the power to bring life to the dead. In the vision, God instructs Ezekiel to prophesy to the dry bones, and as he does, the bones come to life. This illustrates the transformative power of God's word in our lives.

Romans 1:16: ***“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes.”***

Isaiah 55:11 (NIV): "***So is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.***" Hebrews 4:12 (NIV): "***For the word of God is alive and active.***"

Jesus in a loud voice cried to Lazarus, who was dead, "***Come out!***" and Lazarus rose from the dead and come out of his grave. That is the power of God's word.

Practical Lesson: We should have faith in the power of God's word. When we face impossible situations, we can turn to God's word for life and light, guidance and comfort, and hope. God can restore and renew even the most hopeless situations.

1 Peter 1:23, states that the word has life itself, but it also imparts life. John 6:63 – Jesus says, "***The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.***"

This brings me to the second lesson.

The Work of the Holy Spirit

The wind, the breath of life that enters the reassembled bodies in Ezekiel's vision symbolizes the work of the Holy Spirit, who brings spiritual life, a spiritual rebirth for the spiritual dead –the unbelievers, the lifeless, those without hope.

Jesus in His discourse with Nicodemus He said. "***Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.***" ***You cannot see or enter the kingdom of God. You must be born again!***"

This is a divine imperative, and man's great necessity. Without faith in God , lost people are described as dead in the NT, dead in trespasses and sins (Ephesians 2:1). Every lost sinner requires a second birth, a new birth, a spiritual birth.

Like those dead, dry bones, every man needs a spiritual resurrection and spiritual life. The word and the wind gave life to the bones, and so the word of

God and the wind (which is the spirit of God) will give life to those who trust the Lord Jesus Christ for their salvation.

The Word of God and the Spirit of God are the two parents in a spiritual birth. When they come together in the womb of faith, a conception and a new birth takes place.

Are you born again? Have you become a child of God through faith in Christ? If not, you are still dead, dry, lifeless and in your sins and in the valley of despair.

If you die without being born again, you will wish that you had never been born at all. You will go from being dead in your sins, in this present world-cemetery to an eternal, spiritual cemetery, called Hell, where there is no hope of life and light, but darkness all over, with demons of the underworld all around you.

Unity and Reconciliation

The vision also highlights the importance of unity and reconciliation. The reassembled bones represent the reunification of the divided house of Israel, symbolizing God's desire for His people to be united. Ps. 133- ***Behold, how good and how pleasant it is when brethren dwell together in unity! For there, the LORD commanded the blessing, life forevermore.***

We should strive for unity and reconciliation in our relationships, and in the church. God calls us to work towards healing divisions and promoting harmony among people.

God's Sovereignty

The entire vision underscores God's sovereignty and His ability to accomplish His purposes. It shows that God is in control of history and His chosen people and will bring about His plans.

We should acknowledge and submit to God's sovereignty in our lives. Trusting in His divine plan and timing can give us peace and confidence.

Jesus Christ our Lord, through the Spirit of holiness was declared to be the Son of God, by His resurrection from the dead. (Rom. 1:4)

And if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of His Spirit who lives in you. (Rom. 8:11)