



Ezekiel 37:1-28

Valley of Dry Bones

Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel were the prophets of the Babylonian exile. Jeremiah covers the last days of the southern kingdom in Jerusalem as the Babylonians were battering down the walls of the city in 586 B.C. The Israelites in Babylon felt their nation was dead. God's prophecy through Ezekiel was to "the whole house of Israel" which was being held captive. Israel had "died" and there was no hope. The vision of the dry bones is a prophecy of the restoration of Israel to her land when the greater son of David will reign as king and all Israel will "have one shepherd." The reviving of these dead bones signified Israel's national restoration. It depended on God's power alone for a national and a spiritual restoration. The breath of new life in the dead corpses symbolized the work of the Holy Spirit (36:24-28).

The great visions of Ezekiel weave together a theme of hope to a desperate people who are suffering in exile for the sins of their nation. The vision is powerful and vivid. Death in the Old Testament, with few exceptions, was viewed as an impossible state from which there was no return. It was a huge monster with a wide open mouth in which no one could escape. To see this vast army revived and living in the land was startling and unexpected.

The Hebrew prophet Ezekiel watched in visions the glory of the LORD departing from the temple in Jerusalem. He saw the *Shekinah* glory leaving the inner court and moving to the outer court and then rising and moving out to the Mount of Olives and rising up from there. Had God completely forsaken His people?

ISRAEL RESTORED TO THE LAND

In chapter thirty-seven Ezekiel describes the remarkably beautiful vision of the Valley of Dry Bones. He sees in his vision a valley full of dry bones, bones that are not joined together, and then when joined they have no breath in them. Then God breathes upon them and they come to life again. This picture of God's resting grace illustrates what God is going to do with the nation of Israel. From God's perspective she has been lying there as a nation for 2,000 years in a state of death, but a day will come when God will breathe upon this nation. Like the valley of dry bones, it will receive new spiritual life, and God will use it to reestablish His kingdom on earth.

As Ezekiel was delivering his prophecy he saw "the bones come together, bone to its bone" (v. 7), "flesh grew" and "skin covered them" (v. 8), "breath entered them," and "they stood up" (v. 10).

The LORD was kind enough to give us the interpretation of the vision in vv. 11-14. "These bones are the whole house of Israel . . . Thus says the LORD

11-14. "These bones are the whole house of Israel . . . Thus says the LORD God, 'Behold, I will open your graves and cause you to come up out of your graves, My people; and I will bring you into the land of Israel. Then you will know that I am the LORD, when I have opened your graves and caused you to come up out of your graves, My people. And I will put My Spirit within you, and you will come to life; and I will place you on your own land. Then you will know that I, the LORD, have spoken and done it,' declares the LORD" (37:11-14).

Most interpreters agree that the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead is not the main point of this chapter. The main purpose of the vision was the restoration of Israel. However, if God could bring a hopeless dead nation to life, it would be a small step to the realization that the same God could conquer man's greatest enemy, death.

It also needs to be noted that this vision is not a preview of the birth of the New Testament church. The early church, which was composed mainly of Jewish people, never applied the name Israel to the church. That application came centuries later. It is true some of the Old Testament figures are applied to the church, however Romans 11:1-36 reminds us God fully intends to restore Israel and that many will be saved by grace through faith in Christ alone just as many Gentiles are being saved today. The blessings of the new covenant are not an equation of Israel with the church. God did not cast aside His chosen people Israel. The promises given to the nation are not transposed to the church. The arrival of the church age did not circumvent the nation Israel (Romans 10:1-21; 11:25-36). He still has a purpose for the nation.

In a second symbol Ezekiel gives the uniting of the sticks which pictured God's restoring and reuniting His people in the land as a single nation (37:15-22). It has nothing to do with the Mormon cult's teaching that the Book of Mormon and Bible being joined together. That is heresy. The prophecy is the bringing together of two contrasting entities into a "compound unity." It is the rejoining of two nations into one.

Verse twenty-one restates the purpose of the vision and the goal of the LORD. The Lord God says, "Behold, I will take the sons of Israel from among the nations where they have gone, and I will gather them from every side and bring them into their own land; and I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel; and one king will be king over all of them; and they will no longer be two nations, and they will no longer be divided into the two kingdoms" (vv. 21-22). God will have weaned them off idols and "their detestable things" and "transgressions." God will deliver them and "will cleanse them. And they will be My people, and I will be their God" (v. 23).

The vision is powerful because only God can raise the dead (37:3). Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live even if he dies" (John 11:25, NET).

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In the same way the nation coming alive again after 2,000 years is only by the sovereign power of the LORD God. It is a testimony to the sovereign God of the nations. The non-Jewish nations will see the events and will know that I am the LORD who sanctifies Israel, when My sanctuary is in their midst forever (Ezekiel 37:28).

How will God do it? I will put MY Spirit within you, and you will come to life, and I will place you on your own land. Then you will know that I, the LORD, have spoken and done it, declares the LORD (v. 14).

Who will be this "one king" who will be "king for all of them"?

DAVID WILL BE THEIR KING (37:24-28)

The LORD reaffirms and reinforces the previous message to His people about who their deliverer will be. They are incapable of delivering themselves. They are like dead people in a grave. They are powerless. The LORD makes this clear in vv. 24-28.

My servant David will be king over them, and they will all have one shepherd; and they will walk in My ordinances and keep My statutes and observe them. They will live on the land that I gave to Jacob My servant, in which your fathers lived; and they will live on it, they, and their sons and their sons sons, forever; and David My servant will be their prince forever. I will make a covenant of peace with them; it will be an everlasting covenant with them. And I will place them and multiply them, and will set My sanctuary in their midst forever. My dwelling place also will be with them; and I will be their God, and they will be My people. And the nations will know that I am the Lord who sanctifies Israel, when My sanctuary is in their midst forever.

This restoration of Israel is a foundational thought in Hebrew prophecy regarding the exile. Our minds hasten back to Ezekiel 34:23-24 where he has already introduced us to "one shepherd, My servant David." All of these grand prophecies take us back to the original promise to king David in 1 Samuel 7:13-16. The identification of the Shepherd-King David is Jesus Christ the Messiah, the Son of God (Luke 1:69; Revelation 7:14-17; 14; 22:16; 1 Peter 5:4; John 10:11-18; 1:34, 41, 49; Matthew 2:2).

Under "My servant David" the people will be led by the Holy Spirit to obey God's ordinances and keep His statutes (v. 24). They will enjoy the "everlasting" "covenant of peace" (v. 26). You can not escape the emphasis on "everlasting" and "forever" in vv. 25-28 because it is used five times.

John Walvoord keenly notes, "The Israelites residing in Palestine today are not the fulfillment of this prophecy. But it will be fulfilled when God regathers believing Israelites to the land (Jeremiah 31:33; 33:14-16), when Christ returns to establish His kingdom (cf. Matthew 24:30-31)."

Ezekiel's Israel will have an everlasting king from the house of David. "My servant David will be king over them; there will be one shepherd for all of them. They will follow my regulations and carefully observe my statutes. They will live in the land I gave to my servant Jacob, in which your fathers lived; they will live in it they and their children and their grandchildren forever. David my servant will be prince over them forever. I will make a covenant of peace with them; it will be a perpetual covenant with them. I will establish them, increase their numbers, and place my sanctuary among them forever. My dwelling place will be with them; I will be their God, and they will be my people. Then, when my sanctuary is among them forever, the nations will know that I, the Lord, sanctify Israel" (Ezekiel 37:24-28, NET).

Note that it is My servant David, "one shepherd, "they shall live on the land . . . forever, "David My servant shall be their prince forever. The covenant of peace with them . . . will be an everlasting covenant. "

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EVERLASTING WORSHIP IN THE SANCTUARY

Moreover, Ezekiel sees the "sanctuary in their midst forever" (v. 26). In chapter forty, he describes with astonishing, precise detail the coming restoration of the temple. He sees the glory of God returning to the Holy of Holies and the *Shekinah* establishing itself in the Holy of Holies. In his vision Ezekiel sees the throne of God and underneath it the river of God, sweeping through the temple, out the eastern side, across the land and into the Dead Sea to heal its waters. This can't be Zerubbabel's temple because it was consumed by Roman fire in A.D. 70, and therefore, did not stand forever. Many Hebrew scholars remind us that it was never filled with the *Shekinah* glory. It is a glorious picture of the Spirit of God in the millennial kingdom. Ezekiel envisions the future work of God with Israel in bringing about a total restoration of the nation. God is not through with Israel.

We are the temple of the living God

Let's pause and make a beautiful application of Ezekiel 47:1-9 to our lives as believers in Christ. Here is a marvelous picture of the restoration of the temple of God in man. The apostle Paul wrote, "We are the temple of the living God" (2 Corinthians 6:16b). The living God dwells in the holy of holies in the temple of our bodies. This is the secret of the exchanged life of the believer of Jesus Christ. It is a life in which the resources of the Holy Spirit are discovered and applied to our daily lives.

There is a tremendous personal application here for every Christian. God in His saving grace through Jesus Christ makes the believer alive in Him. Jesus stood in the temple on the last day of the feast of the Tabernacles and cried out, "If any man thirst, let him keep coming to Me and let him keep drinking" (John 7:37). "He who believes in Me, as the Scriptures said, 'From his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water'" (v. 38).

Ezekiel saw a throne and flowing out from under the throne was a river. The water of the Spirit came from the very throne of God. Ezekiel sees the river move past the altar, the place of sacrifice. The Christian can never drink of the water of the Spirit unless we are willing to do so by means of the cross of Calvary. We have been cleansed by the blood of the Lamb of God. Our sins are all forgiven. It is only as we are willing to accept God's judgment of death upon the flesh that we can drink of the river of the Spirit of God. The natural man can never please God no matter how reformed he may be.

Ezekiel sees the river quickly grow large enough in which to swim. There are no tributaries. It's source is God. It is a "great, gushing, mighty torrent of life coming from under the throne of God." Three times the prophet in his vision says, "He led me through."

Have you as a believer of the Lord Jesus Christ experienced these living waters? This is what it means to abide in Christ and walk in the Spirit.

The waters were ankle deep

Has the Holy Spirit led you to the place where the waters are ankle deep? I pray you don't stop there. Too many of us have experienced only a shallow sense of God's grace and power in our lives. I am convinced this is why people take off on carnal tangents and chase after religious fads. They flock from one emotional experience to another and remain shallow spiritually.

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We are carnal –still fighting with God and His Spirit within. The carnal believer is still selfish, disobedient, unbelieving. He is only ankle deep, still resisting God's grace.

The waters were knee deep

Moreover, Ezekiel says, "He led me through and it was knee deep." Have you begun to hunger and thirst for the righteousness of God? You will never be satisfied completely until the Holy Spirit places within your heart a hunger and thirst to be right with God in every area of your life. When was the last time you saw God? Only the pure in heart see God. Do you find yourself down on your knees crying out to God for more of His presence?

The waters were waist deep

Then Ezekiel was led through to water up to his loins. There is less and less of the old nature dominating the believer and more and more of God's grace revealing Christ within. Who has the power and control in your life? Are you still in conflict between the sovereign will of man and the sovereign will of God? Zechariah 4:6 says, "Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit," says the Lord of hosts." Has the Holy Spirit brought you to the place of quiet yielding obedience to the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit? Life in the Spirit is the only way to live.

The waters over his head

Ezekiel saw one more thing. "He led me on and the water had risen and it had become a river to swim in." It is the picture of the believer utterly committed to God's will in his life. He is now over his head. God is in control. The grace and the power of God controls his life. When Ezekiel went back to the bank of the river he saw trees. God brought healing to the barren deserted land. The river is fertile. The river of life that flows from the throne of God is full of life.

Galatians 5:22 says God produces in the believer all kinds of spiritual fruit. It is the fruit of the Spirit and wherever the Holy Spirit is in control of the person will be fruitful. "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit" (5:22-25). Some of us have been at every stage of spiritual life Ezekiel is describing and there is still room for growth.

Revelation 21:1-2 is a picture of the same river of life. The river in these passages of Scripture is clearly the Spirit of God's testimony to the risen Messiah. He brings spiritual refreshment and blessing. On either side of the river the tree of life bears fruit with spiritual healing for all who partake of it.

The refreshing waters from this river are free for all who will humble themselves and drink. There is a river of water that flows from the throne of God and the Lamb. The Savior stands and gives the great invitation to all who will come to the fountain and drink. "The Spirit and the Bride say, 'Come,' and let the one who hears say, 'come.' And let the one who is thirsty come: Let the one who wishes take the water of life without cost." Salvation is by grace alone through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone. It is fully offered to all who will come and drink.

To the woman at Jacob's well Jesus said, "Everyone who drinks of this water will thirst again; but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall never thirst; but the water that I will give him will become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life" (John 4:13-14).

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Have you experienced the river of the Spirit of God? Does the Holy Spirit flow right through the center of your life? That is when you begin to live, and your life becomes full of God's presence.

It has been suggested that the temple Ezekiel is describing (48:35) may ultimately picture the resurrection body which is the new temple for God. However, God's present temple is composed of all those who have been built by the Holy Spirit into the house of God.

Tragically, some have never experienced this life in the Spirit that God gives. You are still "dead in your trespasses and sins." And you will remain dead spiritually until the Holy Spirit comes into your life and raises the dead.

What a marvelous vision Ezekiel paints of the eternal home of the saints. This is what the Savior has in store for us (John 14:1-3; Revelation 22:17). The river about the throne of God is the Holy Spirit's testimony of the risen Christ who brings refreshment and blessing to everyone who comes to Him.

Frequently the Scriptures use the symbol of a river as referring to the grace of God in Christ ministered to the soul in the power of the Holy Spirit.

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