

Dry Bones Live!

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Ezekiel 37:1–10 (NKJV) *“The hand of the Lord came upon me and brought me out in the Spirit of the Lord, and set me down in the midst of the valley; and it was full of bones. ² Then He caused me to pass by them all around, and behold, there were very many in the open valley; and indeed they were very dry. ³ And He said to me, ‘Son of man, can these bones live?’ So I answered, ‘O Lord God, You know.’ ⁴ Again He said to me, ‘Prophecy to these bones, and say to them, “O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord! ⁵ Thus says the Lord God to these bones: ‘Surely I will cause breath to enter into you, and you shall live. ⁶ I will put sinews on you and bring flesh upon you, cover you with skin and put breath in you; and you shall live. Then you shall know that I am the Lord.’ ”’ ⁷ So I prophesied as I was commanded; and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and suddenly a rattling; and the bones came together, bone to bone. ⁸ Indeed, as I looked, the sinews and the flesh came upon them, and the skin covered them over; but there was no breath in them. ⁹ Also 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 breath came into them, and they lived, and stood upon their feet, an exceedingly great army.”*

There are three common but different interpretations regarding the valley of dry bones seen by Ezekiel in his vision. The first interpretation is that the valley of dry bones refers to the nation of Israel who has been dispersed by God in judgment but will one day will be regathered to their land. The second interpretation is that they valley of dry bones refers to the resurrection of the dead at Christs' return and the restoration of the kingdom to Israel. The third interpretation is that the valley of dry bones refers to the church, the spiritual Israel of God. The important point is that God wanted the dry bones to live again!

As a matter of historical context for the vision, the nation of Israel had been defeated and many of the Jews had been taken away captive to Babylon. In verse eleven God declares that the valley of dry bones is not literal but represents the "whole house of Israel" who were currently living as exiles in Babylon. They had been in exile for ten years and had lost hope that the nation of Israel would ever be revived again. It was in this historical context that God gave Ezekiel this vision.

Ezekiel said that his vision occurred when *“the hand of the LORD came upon me”*. The “hand of the LORD” refers to divine intervention of God's power. The Psalmist declared, *“The voice of rejoicing and salvation is in the tents of the righteous; the right hand of the Lord does valiantly. ¹⁶ The right hand of the Lord is exalted; the right hand of the Lord does valiantly. ¹⁷ I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the Lord.”¹* This vision was an unexpected and divinely initiated encounter with God.

This encounter occurred through the agency of the Holy Spirit who Ezekiel said *“brought me out in the Spirit of the LORD”*. This act of being “brought out in the Spirit” refers to being lifted up from the natural or physical realm into the heavenly or spiritual realm where supernatural visions and dreams occur. Thus the Holy Spirit carried the prophet in a supernatural way into a supernatural realm to see supernatural things in order to accomplish a supernatural work. This vision was intended to open Ezekiel's spiritual eyes to the real condition of God's people, to reveal the divine solution, and to challenge and engage his faith in order to bring about needed change. In order for spiritual change to occur in the church, God must revive the faith of His people so that they might believe for a miracle from heaven to come and bring the dry bones in the church back to life again! Impossible? With men the answer is “yes” but not with God. Jesus said, *“With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”²*

In the vision the prophet was brought into the midst of a valley full of bones. This valley was essentially a graveyard. Ezekiel was a priest as well as a prophet. It was not lawful for a priest to be around the dead or in a graveyard lest he defile himself ceremonially. Yet unknown to Ezekiel, he was already dwelling in the midst of a spiritual valley of dry bones—God's cut off and hopeless people.

¹ Psalm 118:15–17 (NKJV)

² Matthew 19:26 (NKJV)

In the vision the LORD took Ezekiel on a tour of the valley all around. Ezekiel saw the extent of the problem. There were “very many” bones in the valley indicating the number of exiles living in Babylon. These bones were “very dry” indicating the severity of Israel's hopeless condition and the miracle it would take to revive them again.

As it was with the house of Israel in that day, so it is with the American church today. The church in our land is like this valley of dry bones. Many churches are beautiful on the outside but are often dead on the inside. There is no life in the pulpit and there is death in the pew. If Jesus were on earth today, He might say to the churches what He said to the Pharisees in His day, *“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men’s bones and all uncleanness!”*³ Many Christians today are spiritually dry and they have no hope that anything will ever change. Many believe that the best days of the church are in the past, that there is no life in the present, and there is no hope of change on the horizon. Like the exiles they say, *“Our bones are dry, our hope is lost, and we ourselves are cut off!”*⁴

The condition of the house of Israel was a tragedy. The consequences of their sin had brought Israel to a place that in the natural there was no hope of return. It is easy to look out on the religious landscape of America today and see that the church is in such dire condition that it could never rise and live again in glory. God asked the prophet, “Son of man, can these bones live?” This was not a question of God's ability but an evaluation of Ezekiel's faith. To his credit, Ezekiel did not express unbelief by saying “no”. Neither did he speak presumptively by saying “yes”. Rather he deferred to God's omniscient and omnipotent sovereign purpose when he replied, “O LORD God, You know!” In the midst of the church's dry spiritual condition today, might God be evaluating our faith as He did with Ezekiel? Is it possible the LORD is asking us, “Can these bones live?”

The LORD then gave Ezekiel a command. That command was to “prophesy to these bones!” This must have sounded foolish to Ezekiel. Prophesy to the living is one thing but to prophesy to dry, lifeless, bleached, and scattered bones is quite another!

What did God command Ezekiel to prophesy? He was to speak to the bones and say, *“O dry bones, HEAR the word of the LORD!”* God must sovereignly awaken the *hearing* of the dead before they can hear His word, believe, and live. Resurrection life begins when the dead *hear* the word of God and believe. Jesus declared, *“Most assuredly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live.”*⁵ Before faith can come, there must first be spiritual hearing because faith comes by *hearing and hearing by the word of God*.⁶ Ezekiel prophesied to the dry bones to *hear* the word of the LORD. This involves more than hearing with the natural ear. It means hearing with the spiritual ear. Jesus often concluded His parables by saying, *“He who has ears to hear, let him hear!”*

In order for change to occur, the dry bones needed to hear the *word of the LORD*. What word of the LORD did the dry bones need to hear? It was the word of hope based upon God's promise: *“Surely I will cause breath to enter into you, and you shall live. I will put sinews on you and bring flesh upon you, cover you with skin and put breath I you; and you shall live. Then you will know that I am the LORD.”*⁷ When redemption is in view, God needs a people who will pray and declare the promises of God rather than to continue praying and declaring the problem. When God determines to bring life to His people, He begins by calling forth a prophetic people who will pray and declare according to His word things that do not yet exist as if they already do. We see that God Himself changed Abraham's and Sarah's barrenness by the power of His word: *“(as it is written, ‘I have made you a father of many nations’) in the presence of Him whom he believed—God, who gives life to the dead and calls those things which do not exist as though they did; ¹⁸ who, contrary to hope, in hope believed, so that he became the father of many nations, according to what was spoken, ‘So shall your descendants be.’”*⁸ Revival begins to occur when people begin to believe God's promise and then pray and preach God's promise by the power of His Spirit. Charles Spurgeon said, *“Decayed churches can most certainly be revived by the preaching of the Word, accompanied by the coming of the heavenly breath from the four winds.”*⁹

³ Matthew 23:27 (NKJV)

⁴ Ezekiel 37:11 (NKJV)

⁵ John 5:25 (NKJV)

⁶ Romans 10:17

⁷ Ezekiel 37:5-6 (NKJV)

⁸ Romans 4:17-18 (NKJV)

⁹ Charles Spurgeon, *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, Vol 10, 426

Although God had promised what He would do, nothing changed until Ezekiel began to prophesy according to God's promise. It is important to realize that God works His plan through the faith and obedience of His people. Ezekiel prophesied God's word in two stages. When Ezekiel prophesied the first time, five things began to change.

The first thing that occurred was a noise. This is reminiscent of the Day of Pentecost. When the Holy Spirit came there came a sound like a mighty rushing wind. When God begins to pour out revival, the church begins to be noisy with the sounds of praise and prayer.

The second thing that occurred was a shaking. The bones began to be shaken loose from the dust. When God begins to pour out revival, everything that can be shaken will be shaken. God will shake loose false doctrines, false ministers, and false converts. False ministers and false converts will either get saved or leave.

The third thing that occurred was that God began to reorder His house. Bone came together with bone in their proper place in the body. During times of backsliding, the church usually aligns itself with the traditions and order of man rather than with the order of God. In revival, the New Testament structure of the church begins to be restored. There has to be divinely ordered structure in order for the church to stand.

The fourth thing that occurred was that God began to form the body. Sinews and flesh began to come upon the skeleton structure. Sinews hold bone together with bone to form a joint in the body. The sinews speak of covenant relationships in the body. "Flesh" speaks of the muscles which bring form to the body and enable the joints to move. When revival begins to take place, the body of Christ begins to be *"joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love."*¹⁰

The fifth thing that occurred was that the bodies were covered by skin. Without skin, the sensitive tissues of the body would be subject to all kinds of danger and disease. In the church God has ordained the spiritual covering of duly called and commissioned pastors and elders.

At this point the bodies were fully formed but as of yet there was no life in them. God commanded Ezekiel to prophesy a second time. This time he was commanded to prophesy to the "breath" (or "Spirit") in the name of the LORD. As Ezekiel prophesied to the breath to come from the four winds and to breathe on the slain, they began to live and stand on their feet. The dry bones of that valley were now raised by the power of God and transformed into an "exceedingly great army".

The church in our generation may seem like a valley of dry bones. At the moment the church may seem defeated, dead, dry, and deteriorated. However, God is not through with His church. God has not changed His plan. Jesus said that He will build His church and that the gates of Hades will not prevail against it.¹¹ It is time for the people of God to begin hearing God's word, praying and proclaiming His promises, and embracing the work of the Spirit of life. The church that might seem to be dead is destined to rise again as an exceedingly great army to fulfill God's final work in the earth. It is time to pray and proclaim, "O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD!" It is time to declare, "Dry bones live!"

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¹⁰ Ephesians 4:16 (NKJV)

¹¹ Matthew 16:18