

O Dry Bones, Hear the Word of the Lord

Many things discourage us today, especially the reality of living in a season of moral declension — a time when both the Church and the world are declining in their faithfulness to God and His Word. During times like this, we are sometimes tempted to give up or to slack in our efforts to walk with Him. No time could have been more discouraging than the one faced by the prophet Ezekiel. We know that Ezekiel prophesied surely after the first exile of Israelites from Jerusalem to Babylon, and the time of his message in Ezekiel 37 is 12 years after that exile (see 33:21), or just after the total destruction of the city of Jerusalem and its temple. The Lord provided for Ezekiel and His people a vision to inspire them in this season of natural despair.

Ezekiel 37:1-14

1 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. **2** And he led me around among them, and behold, there were very many on the surface of the valley, and behold, they were very dry. **3** And he said to me, “Son of man, can these bones live?” And I answered, “O Lord God, you know.” **4** Then he said to me, “Prophesy over these bones, and say to them, O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. **5** Thus says the Lord God to these bones: Behold, I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. **6** And I will lay sinews upon you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live, and you shall know that I am the Lord.” **7** So I prophesied as I was commanded. 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. **9** Then he said to me, “Prophesy to the breath; prophesy, 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. **11** Then he said to me, “Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. Behold, they say, ‘Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are indeed cut off.’ **12** Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord God: Behold, I will open your graves and raise you from your graves, O my people. And I will bring you into the land of Israel. **13** And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves, and raise you from your graves, O my people. **14** 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.”

I. **Our sin is more devastating than we ever imagined (vv. 1-3)**

God gives Ezekiel a vision of dead bones in the valley—very many dry bones. This symbolizes the state of Israel (see verse 11). The people had rebelled against a holy God, and the consequences were much greater than they ever would have imagined. These dry bones represent the spiritual death of Israel. We need to realize that our sin has devastating effects on ourselves, those around us, and the world we live in.

II. **His grace is far more powerful than we ever thought (vv. 4-10)**

God asks Ezekiel, “Son of man, can these bones live?” Ezekiel is very careful in his answer: “O Lord God, you know.” Indeed only God knows, but Ezekiel is about to find out. God then commands Ezekiel to preach His Word to these dead bones! Who would ever go to a graveyard to preach? And yet that’s exactly the commission that Ezekiel received from the Lord. God is going to show the power of His Word and the power of His grace by having Ezekiel preach to human beings whose carcasses had been eaten by vultures and whose bones had been baked by the searing sun of the Iraqi desert. But notice the message of God’s word to these dead bones: it is a message not of what they will do, but rather of what He will do. He will give them life and then He will see to it that they know that He is the Lord (v. 6). Ezekiel obeys the Lord and begins to preach to these dead bones, and when he does these

bones begin to connect one to another, and then sinews and flesh and skin are put to those bones. God then commands Ezekiel to prophesy to the Spirit of God that He would bring breath into the bodies of these resurrected bones. And that is exactly what happens. The Hebrew word for “spirit” and “breath” and “wind” is one word: “ruah.” That word is used 10 times in this text. This work of God’s grace is a work of the Holy Spirit.

III. His sovereign grace is for you (vv. 11-14)

God tells Ezekiel to preach to the people that this vision is about them, just as He today reminds us that this is about us. He promises that He will open the people’s graves and raise them up and send them back to their land. And that is exactly what happened when the seemingly invincible Babylonian empire was taken down in 539 BC (see Daniel 5) and Cyrus of Persia began to send the Israelites back to their homeland in 538 BC. The temple was rebuilt, as Jeremiah predicted, in 516 BC (70 years after the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BC), and in the fifth century Nehemiah helped build the wall around Jerusalem to reestablish it as the protected city of God. God kept His promise. He told Ezekiel that he would put His Spirit within His people so that they would live and that they would return to their land. The apostle Paul explains that this is what God is doing in our own day, as He sends upon us the great gift of His Holy Spirit: “...so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.” The Spirit of God is a gift leading us to the promise of Abraham, which is the promise of a land, a people, and a great name. This promise will be fulfilled when we reach the new heavens and the new earth (Revelation 21-22). The gift of the Spirit is that we might live now and that we might make it home safely.

No matter what our discouragements, we are given a grand vision of the character of God and of the work of God on behalf of His people. He is taking us home and He is doing so because He loves us and because He is jealous for the glory of His own Name.

Discussion Questions

1. Why were the people of God discouraged in Ezekiel’s day? (see vs. 11) Why are Christians discouraged in our day?
2. What are the key lessons we should learn from Ezekiel’s vision in this passage?
3. What do we learn about the nature of God’s Word in this text?
4. In verse 14, Ezekiel connects the gift of God’s Spirit with the land He promised His people. In Galatians 3:14 Paul seems to suggest the same connection between the Spirit of God and the promise given to Abraham. Explain that connection.
5. Did God fulfill His promises to Ezekiel and to Israel? What promises has He made to you that you are hereby encouraged to believe more strongly?

Going Deeper

1. What has discouraged you lately in your walk with the Lord?
2. How does this passage help you in your discouragement?