

Israel – From Dry Bones to Restored Kingdom Ezekiel 37

Ezekiel 37:1-10 - *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, "Prophesy 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, "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 breath came into them, and they lived, and stood upon their feet, an exceedingly great army."

Background Notes

Ezekiel 33-39 contain six messages of hope and encouragement for Israel. The context reveals that these messages were addressed to the Jewish people who were captives in Babylon. The specific purpose of the messages was to give them encouragement and hope about the future of their nation, including the Land of Israel. It's important to realize that these messages were **not** addressed to the Church, and should not be considered as a spiritualized reference to the Church. However, we as Christians can certainly draw *applications* from these messages (as we can from all of Scripture).

The fourth and fifth messages of hope and encouragement for the people of Israel were recorded in Ezekiel 37. The fourth message actually began back in chapter 36:16. Ezekiel 37:15 to the end of the chapter was the fifth message of hope for Israel.

Doctrinal Points

1. The vision of the dry bones predicted the future restoration of Israel.

As Ezekiel viewed the dry bones that were scattered before him in the valley, he probably thought of a defeated and slaughtered army that had been left without burial – remains that had been exposed for a lengthy time to the elements, and to scavenging birds and beasts. What a fitting description of Judah, after the Babylonians utterly defeated and slaughtered the Jewish people. The fall of Jerusalem in 586 BC, including the destruction of Solomon's Temple, was indeed a complete defeat of the kingdom of Judah.

The Lord asked Ezekiel, *"Son of man, can these bones live?"*(v3). Ezekiel responded that only God could bring life to those dead bones. So the Lord told Ezekiel to prophesy to those bones and predict that life would return to them. As Ezekiel was prophesying, there was a rattling noise, and the bones started coming together, bone to bone!

Notice that there were three phases in the fulfillment of the prophecy: first the "skeleton" stage, then the "body" stage, and finally the "life" stage. What could the interpretation of this prophetic vision possibly be? Well, we don't have to wonder, because the Lord Himself gave the interpretation.

Ezekiel 37:11-14 - *"Then He said to me, 'Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They indeed say, 'Our bones are dry, our hope is lost, and we ourselves are cut off!' 12 Therefore prophesy and say to them, 'Thus says the Lord God: 'Behold, O My people, I will open your graves and cause you to come up from your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel. 13 Then you shall know that I am the Lord, when I have opened your graves, O My people, and brought you up from your graves. 14 I will put My Spirit in you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I, the Lord, have spoken it and performed it,' says the Lord.'"*

The bones represented the whole **house of Israel** - Jewish people from all twelve tribes. Notice that the bones did **not** represent the "Christian army" or the Christian Church, as is sometimes taught. Verse 12 indicates that the bones represented the scattered **Jewish people** would be brought back into the **land of Israel**. Where is that? It's where the land of Israel has always been. (Look at your Bible maps!) This prophecy will not be completely fulfilled until the Jewish people are spiritually restored to the Lord (v14).

Now the big question: was this prophecy fulfilled in the past, when the Jews came back to the Land from their captivity in Babylon? No, it was not fulfilled at that time, but that return foreshadowed the ultimate future fulfillment of this prophecy. In the future the Jewish people will be brought back to the Land, and there will be a spiritual revival of the Jewish people. The Jewish people will turn to their Messiah whom they once rejected.

How far in the future will this restoration take place? It seems to me that it can't be very far in the future, because it appears we're already in Stage One of the prophecy: the bone-rattling and skeleton stage. The Jewish people are returning to the Land of Israel, and there is a secular state of Israel. But more is yet to come! The vision of the dry bones predicted the future restoration of Israel.

2. The sign of the two sticks predicted the future restoration of Israel.

Ezekiel 37:15-28 - *“Again the word of the Lord came to me, saying, ¹⁶“As for you, son of man, take a stick for yourself and write on it: ‘For Judah and for the children of Israel, his companions.’ Then take another stick and write on it, ‘For Joseph, the stick of Ephraim, and for all the house of Israel, his companions.’ ¹⁷ Then join them one to another for yourself into one stick, and they will become one in your hand.*

¹⁸“And when the children of your people speak to you, saying, ‘Will you not show us what you mean by these?’— ¹⁹ say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord God: “Surely I will take the stick of Joseph, which is in the hand of Ephraim, and the tribes of Israel, his companions; and I will join them with it, with the stick of Judah, and make them one stick, and they will be one in My hand.”’ ²⁰ And the sticks on which you write will be in your hand before their eyes.

²¹“Then say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord God: “Surely I will take the children of Israel from among the nations, wherever they have gone, and will gather them from every side and bring them into their own land; 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; they shall no longer be two nations, nor shall they ever be divided into two kingdoms again. ²³ They shall not defile themselves anymore with their idols, nor with their detestable things, nor with any of their transgressions; but I will deliver them from all their dwelling places in which they have sinned, and will cleanse them. Then they shall be My people, and I will be their God.

²⁴“David My servant shall be king over them, and they shall all have one shepherd. They shall also walk in My judgments and observe My statutes, and do them. ²⁵ Then they shall dwell in the land that I have given to Jacob My servant, where your fathers dwelt; and they shall dwell there, they, their children, and their children’s children, forever; and My servant David shall be their prince forever. ²⁶ Moreover I will make a covenant of peace with them, and it shall be an everlasting covenant with them; I will establish them and multiply them, and I will set My sanctuary in their midst forevermore. ²⁷ My tabernacle also shall be with them; indeed I will be their God, and they shall be My people. ²⁸ The nations also will know that I, the Lord, sanctify Israel, when My sanctuary is in their midst forevermore.””

Ezekiel 37:15-28 was the fifth message of hope and encouragement for Israel. Ezekiel was to use an object lesson in this message. He took two sticks and wrote on one, *“for Judah and for the children of Israel, his companions.”* He wrote on the other, *“for Joseph, the stick of Ephraim and for all the house of Israel, his companions.”* The name “Ephraim” was a reference to the northern kingdom of Israel. In the Old Testament prophecies, the northern kingdom was often called Ephraim, because Ephraim was one of the great tribes of the northern kingdom. Ezekiel then joined these two sticks in his hand so that they appeared to be one stick.

Once again, this prophecy does **not** have anything to do with “unity in the Church.” It refers to the future restoration of the “whole house of **Israel.**” Then there will no longer be two kingdoms, but the entire nation will be reunited into one kingdom. There are no so-called “lost tribes of Israel,” because God knows the exact location of every Jewish person. The whole house of Israel will be restored as one nation in the land of Israel (v21-22).

In case there's any question about where the land of Israel is located, look at verse 25: "*Then they shall dwell in the land that I have given to Jacob My servant, where your fathers dwelt; and they shall dwell there.*" That restoration will be spiritual as well as physical (v23). This restoration did not take place when the Jews returned from their 70-year captivity in Babylon. This restoration will be a future restoration, at the time of the New and everlasting Covenant (v26). This restoration will take place when the Lord returns. Then He will re-establish the Davidic throne, and as "great David's greater Son," Jesus Christ will reign as King over Israel - and over the whole world as well!

Do you remember what the angel Gabriel told Mary about Jesus? Luke 1:31-33: "*He will be great, and will be called the Son of the highest, and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever and of His kingdom, there will be no end.*" The sign of the two sticks predicted the future restoration of Israel.

Practical Application

Your dry bones can come to life!

There is only one proper *interpretation* of any Scripture, but many *applications* can be made from that Scripture. When properly interpreted, Ezekiel's vision of the valley of the dry bones referred to the Jewish people - but it certainly can be *applied* in many ways. Remember - **one interpretation, many applications!**

This passage has an application to the unbeliever: your dry bones can come to life!

As an unbeliever, you are spiritually dead, like dry bones in a valley. If you turn to Jesus Christ in true repentance and trust Him as your personal Lord and Savior, you will be born again. You will come to life. Your dry bones can come to life!

This passage can also be applied to a believer who has backslidden, and is no longer walking with the Lord: your dry bones can come to life! Right now your condition is like dry bones in a valley. You need to be revived. Repent, and allow the Lord restore you to a vibrant faith and walk with Him. Your dry bones can come to life!

These verses can be applied to a dead church as well: your dry bones can come to life! Through prayer and proper preaching of the Word, life can come to your church once again.

Notice from verse 14 that it is the **Spirit** and the **Word** that bring life. And that's the way it has always been. Through the **application of the Word of God** and the **work of the Holy Spirit of God**, your dry bones can come to life!