

Survey of the Bible Ezekiel 37:1-12

Ezekiel 37:1-14 ^{NAU} The hand of the LORD was upon me, and He brought me out by the Spirit of the LORD and set me down in the middle of the valley; and it was full of bones. ² He caused me to pass among them round about, and behold, *there were* very many on the surface of the valley; and lo, *they were* very dry. ³ He said to me, "Son of man, can these bones live?" And I answered, "O Lord GOD, You know." ⁴ Again He said to me, "Prophecy 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 that you may come to life. ⁶ I will put sinews on you, make flesh grow back on you, cover you with skin and put breath in you that you may come alive; and you will know that I am the LORD.'" ⁷ So I prophesied as I was commanded; and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and behold, a rattling; and the bones came together, bone to its bone. ⁸ And I looked, and behold, sinews were on them, and flesh grew and skin covered them; but there was no breath in them. ⁹ Then He said to me, "Prophecy 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 come to life.'" ¹⁰ So I prophesied as He commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they came to life 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 has perished. We are completely cut off.'" ¹² "Therefore prophesy and say to them, '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. ¹³ "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. ¹⁴ "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."

There's a lot going here, and again, we need to be careful to keep the context in mind and what it is that God is communicating to Ezekiel and to us.

But the first question we need to ask is this. Is Ezekiel experiencing an actual act of God bringing dead bones to life, and by implication dead people, not unlike how He did with

Lazarus, or is this a vision Ezekiel receives of dead bones coming to life?

The context gives us the answer. Anyone see it in verse 11?

Obviously, the whole nation of Israel was not dead. It was not laying in a valley and it was not lying on the valley floor in a condition where the bones of every Jew was dried out.

This is a vision given to Ezekiel, which by the way, was probably very real looking to Ezekiel as he literally saw dead bones scattered on the ground.

But because God has identified what these dry bones are we know that they are representative of something else.

What do they represent?

The house of Israel in a lifeless condition.

And what is the larger context in Ezekiel of this vision regarding Israel at this time in history?

They are being judged by God for their rejection of Him and His promise of life found in the Messiah.

With this backdrop let's spend some time looking at this vision and what it represents.

If this vision is a picture of the house of Israel then what is the message to this house?

You are dead in your trespasses and sins.

Where in the N.T. does this exact phrase appear?

Ephesians 2:1-3 ^{NAU} And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, ² in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. ³ Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.

So, if the house of Israel is spiritually dead then would this vision not be quite appropriate to show this condition?

So, this is what God is demonstrating in this vision to Ezekiel. But this vision is also showing something other than death and that is the means to coming back to life.

And God identifies what this life is. But before we go there let's look at what Ezekiel is told to do in regards to these dry bones.

In verses 4-9 Ezekiel is simply told to speak to these very dry bones. And what he is commanded to speak is a declaration of what God is about to do.

Ezekiel 37:4 ⁴ Again He said to me, "Prophesy over these bones and say to them, 'O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD.'

At this particular point do the bones hear what Ezekiel is prophesying and respond?

No. There is only the proclamation of what God is going to do. And this is what we are told.

Ezekiel 37:5 ⁵ "Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones, 'Behold, I will cause breath to enter you that you may come to life.

So, before these bones can respond to the word of the Lord what must happen first according to what we read here?

God must bring them to life. Again, we see the exact counterpart teaching in the N.T. in the same passage that we saw in Ephesians.

Ephesians 2:4-6 ⁴ But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), ⁶ and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus,

So, as we look at these dry bones, which is indicative of spiritual death, what must God do before anyone can even have a desire to seek God?

He must first bring life to the dead and then and only then can the dead identify God as Lord.

Ezekiel 37:6 ⁶ 'I will put sinews on you, make flesh grow back on you, cover you with skin and put breath in you that you may come alive; and you will know that I am the LORD.'"

Notice what is missing in this verse.

Where does it say that these dead bones, who have been given flesh and bones and the breath of life, repent of their sin and embrace their God as Lord and Savior?

But we've gotten a little ahead of ourselves because the context does not have them coming to life yet, they are simply being

prophesied to as to what God is going to do to them in the very near future.

Ezekiel 37:7-8 ⁷ So I prophesied as I was commanded; and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and behold, a rattling; and the bones came together, bone to its bone. ⁸ And I looked, and behold, sinews were on them, and flesh grew and skin covered them; but there was no breath in them.

So, in the vision Ezekiel is simply giving these dry bones the good news of what is about to happen to them. Dare I say the gospel?

And now, something amazing begins to happen just as God promised.

The dry bones begin to be collected together.

Again, by way of reminder, are the dry bones collecting themselves together or is God and God alone doing this work without any assistance from the dry bones?

So, we've got these dry bones coming together and as they do skin and sinews join with the bones to form what?

People. The problem is that though they are no longer dry bones they are people who are what according to the end of verse 8?

Still dead.

By the way, where have we seen this imagery of a fully formed physical human being awaiting the breath of the Lord before they can be identified as being fully human?

Genesis 2:7 ⁷ Then the LORD God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.

This is precisely what we see in Ezekiel.

Ezekiel 37:8-10 ⁸ And I looked, and behold, sinews were on them, and flesh grew and skin 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 come to life."" ¹⁰ So I prophesied as He commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they came to life and stood on their feet, an exceedingly great army.

The difference between the account in Genesis and Ezekiel is that man became a living being for the first time in history in Genesis as he was given life by God, both physical and spiritual.

In Ezekiel we have a post rebellion people being depicted where even though they may have physical life we are now talking about a spiritual life being restored to them as only God can accomplish as He raises these bones.

So, up to this point we have people who, though they look like they should be alive, since they are now covered with skin and muscle and all things needed to operate in this world, they are still dead with no life in them.

But something is about to happen to them that will change everything.

Ezekiel 37:9 ⁹ Then He said to me, "Prophecy 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 come to life.'"

So, according to this verse what is the means by which these people come to spiritual life?

As God gives them breath. The Hebrew word for breath is *ruach* which can also be translated spirit, and depending on the context it can be the spirit of man or the Holy Spirit of God.

The Greek translation, or the LXX, of this text is *pneuma*, again meaning spirit.

So, the question is, is it the spirit of man that is bringing spiritual life to man in the context of Ezekiel, or the Spirit of God that brings spiritual life to man in Ezekiel?

It is clearly an outside force being pressed upon these men who appear human but have no breath at this point until Ezekiel prophesies over these people and we read this.

Ezekiel 37:9 Thus says the Lord GOD, "Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain, that they come to life.'""

If God is the One breathing on them to give them spiritual life, who is the agent through which this breath comes upon them?

The Holy Spirit. Remember, the context of chapter 37 comes on the heels of chapter 36 where God makes a promise to the house of Israel.

Ezekiel 36:24-28 ²⁴ "For I will take you from the nations, gather you from all the lands and bring you into your own land. ²⁵ "Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. ²⁶ "Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷ ***"I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes,*** and you will be careful to observe My ordinances. ²⁸ "You will live in the land that I gave to your forefathers; so you will be My people, and I will be your God.

Here is a picture of a scattered people being brought under one roof as they are gathered from all the nations. But they are being gathered from all nations to be sprinkled with clean water where God will cleanse them from all filthiness as He gives them a new heart and a new spirit.

And then He says what in verse 27?

“I will put My Spirit, (Ruach) in you” and cause you to do something you were unable and unwilling to do in the past which was to walk in My statutes. And from that point only will you be considered My people and I your God.

The work of salvation is entirely God’s from beginning to end. And no one gets the glory but God.

This is the exact same work the Holy Spirit is doing today that was prophesied here in Ezekiel.

Titus 3:5-6 ⁵ He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, ⁶ whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior,

What Ezekiel is addressing is a work of the Spirit of God that takes the deadness of a person’s heart and makes that person spiritually alive and this is seen clearly in verses 10-11.

Ezekiel 37:10-11 ¹⁰ So I prophesied as He commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they came to life 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 has perished. We are completely cut off.'

A couple of things I want us to see here: the amount of people who come to life and what that new life promotes in them for the first time.

The first thing we notice in verse 10 is that once the life comes into them they stand on their feet. At this point they are no longer dead.

But as those who are now alive, what is the first thing that comes out of their mouths according to the end of verse 11?

'Our bones are dried up and our hope has perished. We are completely cut off.'

Why is this significant as it relates to people who have just come to life?

Because for the first time in their spiritual lives they have eyes to see and ears to hear that they stand guilty before the Lord, and they have an honest and healthy fear of God and His holiness.

Proverbs 9:10 ¹⁰ The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, And the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.

What do these newly born again people understand?

That they stand condemned in their sin, and cut off from their God.

Why is this so important in the beginning of wisdom?

Because now you know where to seek for the solution to your sin problem and it's found in the One who has put skin on your dry bones and given you the breath to stand on your feet as you now stand before the Holy One.

But the Holy One is not done with you yet because now that you can stand, now that you have the wisdom that leads to life, now that you know your position before God is one that is cut off, this God who made you stand is about to continue to do His work in you.

Ezekiel 37:12-14 ¹² "Therefore prophesy and say to them, "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. ¹³ "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. ¹⁴ "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."

What is the message to these people who are now able to hear the word of the Lord as He has caused them to stand before Him?

I will resurrect you to life as you come out of your grave. I will put My Spirit within you and you will come to life and live in the land that I have given you.

There's a lot here and we still haven't dealt with the issue of the phrase, the "whole house of Israel" and who that is.

But what is this resurrection that God is speaking to here, keeping in mind the context of being given the breath of life so that they can stand before God with a wisdom that leads to life?

There are actually two resurrections being alluded to here, which is in keeping with N.T. teaching.

Revelation 20:4-6 ⁴ Then I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was given to them. And I *saw* the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony of Jesus and because of the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received the mark on their forehead and on their hand; and they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. ⁵ The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were completed. ***This is the first resurrection.*** ⁶ Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years.

If there is a first resurrection, then it would stand to reason that there is a second resurrection as we will see next week, especially in light of the fact that it parallels a first and second death.

Revelation 2:11 ¹¹ 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes will not be hurt by ***the second death.***'

Revelation 20:6 ⁶ Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the ***first resurrection***; over these ***the second death*** has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years.

Revelation 20:14 ¹⁴ Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is *the second death*, the lake of fire.

Well, again if there is a second death then we must be able to identify the first death. And we will look at both the first and second death along with the first and second resurrection next week.

And this is precisely what Ezekiel is prophesying.