

THE RESURRECTION AND REUNIFICATION OF GOD’S PEOPLE: SYMBOLIZED BY A VISION OF DRY BONES EZEKIEL 37:01–14

Introduction

Hopelessness is an awful feeling. When people feel hopeless, they become dejected, demoralized, despondent and often desperate. The future seems dark and bleak, offering them no glimmer of light whatsoever. Hopeless people feel as if they are in a no-win situation, in an unchanging and unsolvable crisis.

A spirit of hopelessness gripped the Jewish exiles being held captive in Babylon. The Babylonians had totally destroyed their nation, including Jerusalem and the temple, and devastated their land. Now the people were scattered throughout the nations of the world. It was as if they were *dead* as a people, as though they were nothing more than “dry bones.” They thought that their situation was utterly hopeless.

But that is not what God thought. The LORD’s thoughts are different from man’s thoughts. He saw no reason for His people to feel hopeless, for He possessed the power to conquer any of their enemies and to deliver them from any distressing situation.

This passage is an amazing message of hope to all who feel hopeless. In it, God gives two signs that demonstrate His power to meet the needs of His people, no matter what they may be facing. This is, *The Resurrection and Reunification of God’s People: Symbolized by a Vision of Dry Bones and a Visual of Joined Sticks*, Ezekiel 37:1-28.

- I. The vision of dry bones: a picture of God’s power to give new life to the hopeless and to resurrect the dead (vv. 1-14).
- II. The visual of joined sticks: a sign of God’s people being reunited (vv. 15-28).

Ezekiel 37:1–14 The Vision of Dry Bones: A Picture of God’s Power to Give New Life to the Hopeless and to Resurrect the Dead

The LORD gave Ezekiel a very special vision that is known as *The Vision of Dry Bones*. Ezekiel actually saw a valley full of scattered dry bones that were gathered together, given new flesh, and brought back to life. Only the *power of God* could accomplish such a phenomenal event. It was totally contrary to the nature of death, but nevertheless it was going to take place. Scripture gives a graphic description of Ezekiel’s vision:

1. The dry bones pictured the hopelessness of death (vv. 1-3). Scattered all over a valley floor were the dried and bleached bones of decomposed corpses. The LORD led Ezekiel to walk all over the valley to observe the scene of human bones and death (v. 2). No flesh whatsoever remained on the bones. The fact that there were so many bones in one valley suggests that these were probably the decomposed bodies
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of soldiers killed in battle. As Ezekiel walked back and forth throughout the valley, the LORD asked Him an astounding question: "Son of man, can these bones live? Can they become living beings again?" Of course, Ezekiel knew what we know, that no human power could resurrect these bones to live again. But God's power could. With God nothing is impossible (Mat 19:26; Luke 1:37). Thus Ezekiel replied in faith, stating that only God knows whether or not these bones could live again.

2. The LORD told Ezekiel that there was a solution to the Jews' hopelessness (vv. 4-10). God said that they would live again, and He told His prophet how it would happen. God told His prophet to prophesy to the dry bones (the Jews) and encourage them to listen to the Word of God (v. 4). Ezekiel was to tell them that the LORD was going to breathe life into them and make them live again (v. 5). He would give the bones muscle and flesh and cover them with skin (v. 6a). Then He would breathe life into them, and they would come to life again (v. 6b). Note that God had one purpose in giving new life to the Jews: so they would know that He is the only living and true God (v. 6c).

Ezekiel did exactly as God commanded. He preached to the bones that were scattered all over the floor of the valley. Soon after he began preaching, there was a startling noise, a loud rattling sound, and the bones of each body began to come together as a complete skeleton (v. 7). Stunned, the prophet watched as muscles, flesh and skin formed over the bones. Finally the bodies were complete. But they were still dead, for there was no breath of life in them (v. 8).

Once again, the LORD instructed His prophet to begin preaching. But this time Ezekiel was to prophesy to the wind. He was to summon the *breath* of the four winds to breathe life into the dead bodies (v. 9).

It should be noted that the word "breath" can also mean "wind," "spirit," or "Spirit." Most interpreters think that Ezekiel was summoning the "breath of life" to enter the dead bodies. But some scholars believe that he was summoning God's Spirit to give life to the dead bodies. Whatever the case, no breath of life ever enters a person apart from God's Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the very source of life. Thus the Spirit of God responded to Ezekiel's summons by putting the breath of life into the dead bodies. The vast army of bodies came alive and stood up on their feet (v. 10).

- c. The LORD Himself explained the meaning of the vision of the dry bones (vv. 11-14). The dry bones represented the whole house of Israel, all the Jews who had been exiled from the promised land and scattered across the face of the world. The people felt cut off from their parts and utterly hopeless (v. 11). But in God's eyes their situation was not hopeless, for He had the power to give new life to the Jewish nation. Thus the LORD instructed His prophet to give the despairing exiles a wonderful promise. God would resurrect them from the grave of their exile. He would return

them to the land of Israel, the land that He had promised them (v. 12). Then the people would know that He alone is the living and true God (v. 13). The LORD would put His Spirit in those people who felt hopelessly dead, and they would live again. They would return to the promised land. In that day they would know that the LORD had done exactly what He promised. God's Word and promises were true, and they would be fulfilled (v. 14).

Thought 1. People gripped by hopelessness often feel as though they are *already dead*. They think that death would be preferable to continuing on in the grip of despair. As a result, hopelessness often leads to suicide. But no matter how hopeless we may feel, there is no worse hopelessness than that of a corpse. A dead person has no hope whatsoever.

God has the power to give new life to the hopeless. As long as we have the *breath of life*, God's power can give us hope by helping us conquer whatever crisis we face. Whatever the crisis is — a broken relationship, disease, injury, loss of job, conflict, temptation, enslavement to some habit — God has the power to conquer it. He can give us a *new life*, a new beginning, a brand new start that will make it seem as if we have been resurrected from the dead. We should never become so hopeless that we feel dead, for God's power is always available to quicken us, to make us alive. Listen to what God's Holy Word says:

Luke 15:24 “*For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.*’ So they began to celebrate.” (Also see vv. 11-24).

John 1:12-13 “*Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God. Children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.*”

John 6:63 “*The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life.*”

Rom 8:11 *And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you.*

2 Cor 5:17 *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!*

Eph 2:1-9 *As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions — it is by grace you*

have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God — not by works, so that no one can boast.

Col 2:13 *When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins.*

1 Pet 1:23 *For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.*

Psa 119:25 *I am laid low in the dust; preserve my life according to your word.*

Psa 119:50 *My comfort in my suffering is this: Your promise preserves my life.*

Psa 119:149 *Hear my voice in accordance with your love; preserve my life, LORD, according to your laws.*

Psa 143:11 *For your name's sake, LORD, preserve my life; in your righteousness, bring me out of trouble.*

Ezek 36:26 *I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.*

Thought 2. The vision of dry bones demonstrates the enormous power of God, the glorious truth that God has the power to conquer death (Heb 2:14-15). He who has the power to resurrect the dead nation of Israel also has the power to resurrect the dead bodies of the human race. He can find all the minute particles (atoms, protons or whatever) that made up the body of a dead person and refashion them into the original human body. And God's Holy Word declares that He will do this. He will resurrect the dead. A day of resurrection is coming, a day when He will raise up every human being who has ever lived. All will stand before Him to give an account for their behaviour, whether good or bad. Some will inherit eternal life, and some will be condemned to eternal death. Listen to what God's Holy Word says about the resurrection:

John 5:24-29 *"I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life. I tell you the truth, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son to have life in himself. And he has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man. Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice...."*

John 11:25-26 *Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies. And whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?"*

John 6:40 *“For my Father’s will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.”*

Acts 24:14-15 *However, I admit that I worship the God of our fathers as a follower of the Way, which they call a sect. I believe everything that agrees with the Law and that is written in the Prophets, and I have the same hope in God as these men, that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked.*

1 Cor 15:20-23 *But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own turn: Christ, the first fruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him.*

1 Cor 15:35-38 *But someone will ask, “How are the dead raised? With what kind of body will they come?” How foolish! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. When you sow, you do not plant the body that will be, but just a seed, perhaps of wheat or of something else. But God gives it a body as he has determined, and to each kind of seed he gives its own body. The sun has one kind of splendour, the moon another and the stars another; and star differs from star in splendour. So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body.*

1 Cor 15:51-54 *Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed — in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: “Death has been swallowed up in victory.”*

2 Cor 4:14 *Because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you in his presence.*

1 Th 4:13-18 *Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. According to the Lord’s own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage each other with these words.*

Psa 16:9-11 *Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest secure, because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay. You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.*

Psa 49:14-15 *Like sheep they are destined for the grave, and death will feed on them. The upright will rule over them in the morning; their forms will decay in the grave, far from their princely mansions. But God will redeem my life from the grave; he will surely take me to himself.*

Psa 71:20 *Though you have made me see troubles, many and bitter, you will restore my life again; from the depths of the earth you will again bring me up.*

Isa 26:19 *But your dead will live; their bodies will rise. You who dwell in the dust, wake up and shout for joy. Your dew is like the dew of the morning; the earth will give birth to her dead.*

Hosea 13:14 *“I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death. Where, O death, are your plagues? Where, O grave, is your destruction?” I will have no compassion. ■*