



Unit .15

Session .06

God Pictures a Future Hope

Scripture



Ezekiel 37:1-6, 16-17, 20-28

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, “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, 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.” ... **16** “Son of man, take a stick and write on it, ‘For Judah, and the people of Israel associated with him’; then take another stick and write on it, ‘For Joseph (the stick of Ephraim) and all the house of Israel associated with him.’ **17** And join them one to another into one stick, that they may become one in your hand. ... **20** When the sticks on which you write are in your hand before their eyes, **21** then say to them, Thus says the LORD God: Behold, I will take the people of Israel from the nations among which they have gone, and will gather

them from all around, and bring them to 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, and they shall be no longer two nations, and no longer divided into two kingdoms. **23** They shall not defile themselves anymore with their idols and their detestable things, or with any of their transgressions. But I will save them from all the backslidings in which they have sinned, and will cleanse them; and they shall be my people, and I will be their God. **24** “My servant David shall be king over them, and they shall all have one shepherd. They shall walk in my rules and be careful to obey my statutes. **25** They shall dwell in the land that I gave to my servant Jacob, where your fathers lived. They and their children and their children’s children shall dwell there forever, and David my servant shall be their prince forever. **26** I will make a covenant of peace with them. It shall be an everlasting covenant with them. And I will set them in their land and multiply them, and will set my sanctuary in their midst forevermore. **27** My dwelling place shall be with them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. **28** Then the nations will know that I am the LORD who sanctifies Israel, when my sanctuary is in their midst forevermore.”

Intro Options



Main Point:
**God's Word is capable
of bringing life where
there is none.**

Option 1

CPR, short for cardiopulmonary resuscitation, finds its origin in the mid-1700s with mouth-to-mouth resuscitation used for drowning victims. The first successful use of chest compressions for human resuscitation was recorded in 1903. The technique used today for CPR was developed in 1960. CPR is attributed with helping to save millions of lives. Immediate application of CPR after a cardiac arrest can double or triple a person's chances of survival. CPR is, without question, an amazing gift from modern science to humanity.

▪ **What other medical advances amaze you?**

As incredible as CPR is, it is doubtful that any medical professional would perform CPR on a skeleton. Bringing dry bones back to life defies all scientific and medical logic, but that is exactly what God did in Ezekiel's vision of the valley of dry bones.

Ezekiel ministered to the exiled Judeans suffering in Babylon during a time when depression hovered over God's people. They mourned not only their current circumstances but also the destruction of Jerusalem. Responding to their cries, however, the Lord delivered a message of hope. With Ezekiel as His mouthpiece, God instilled hope with promises of restored land, rebuilt cities, and unity between both Israel and Judah under one king. God's message to the suffering Israelites still speaks to us today. Hope and restoration exists through the redeeming power of the one King, Jesus Christ. He alone is able to restore both our relationship with God and with one another.

Option 2

Did you know that a cactus being prickly actually helps it conserve water? Many plants quickly lose their water supply through their leaves. The water simply evaporates. However, cacti absorb large quantities of water in a short amount of time, thanks to a complex root system that lies only an inch below the ground. Cacti store up plenty of water when it rains, so they have access to it throughout the driest parts of the season. Conserving water is vital for these desert plants, and being prickly keeps animals from stealing their water supply. The desert may seem void of life, but it isn't. In the same way, we should store God's Word within us to bring life to us when we're spiritually dry.

▪ **Why is it important to consistently be in God's Word? How does this help us in tough times?**

TEACHING PLAN

As we approach the final session in this volume, we encounter a scene from the prophet Ezekiel that is full of both despair and hope. The Lord brought His prophet to a valley full of dry bones to show him the hopelessness of life in exile, but also to reveal the power of God to raise the dead and restore His people. The vision gave hope to the people in Ezekiel's day that God would bring them back to their land. It also gives us hope by reminding us the Word of God has resurrection power, which makes us alive and restores our relationship to God.

Read Ezekiel 37:1-6.



The vision opens with Ezekiel being transported by the Spirit of the Lord to a valley filled with dry, bleached bones. The number of bones was vast, enough to constitute an entire army (v. 10). The Lord led him back and forth among the scattered bones to see that no life or flesh existed in or upon them.

God made His point clear in verse 11: The bones littering the valley were representative of the whole house of Israel, and she was dead. The people of Israel considered themselves beyond resuscitation as a nation. Gone was any hope of God's people returning to life and to their homeland. For too long they had rejected the Lord and His messengers, and as time passed, their hearts became increasingly hardened. The people's rebellion ultimately led to God punishing them by means of exile. In short, their disregard for God's word, as preached by the prophets, led to their death.

▪ How does a rejection of God's Word lead to death?

After Ezekiel observed the valley's dry bones, God asked him if those bones could live. Ezekiel knew the impossible was possible with God. The difference in this scenario was that God would have to resuscitate dry bones instead of corpses shortly after death. But rather than diminish God, Ezekiel replied in submission to the sovereign knowledge and power of God.

God then channeled His divine power through Ezekiel. The Lord commanded the prophet to prophesy to the bones. As Ezekiel spoke the promise of life, the bones began to rattle, and then they were joined by tendons and covered with flesh (vv. 7-8). The Lord then completed the resurrection process by breathing life into the lifeless bodies (v. 10).

Here we must recognize the power of God's word to bring life. The idea of preaching to dry bones seems like a waste of time. Can you remember the last time a skeleton listened to you? Yet Ezekiel spoke the word of God, and it brought life to dry bones. What a beautiful reminder that God's Word has the power to bring restoration to all aspects of life. There is no hidden crevice in our lives that God's Word cannot reach and redeem. In our weaker moments, we may doubt God's power to make a situation or relationship whole again. We may question whether God could change a hardened heart. But we would be wrong in our doubt because a God who can raise dry bones to life can work miracles in other aspects of our lives as well.

▪ How have you seen God's Word bring restoration to your life or to the life of someone you know?

COMMENTARY

Main Point:
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Ezekiel 37

1. Ezekiel, the son of a priest, was part of the deportation of Judeans in 597 BC, the second of three waves of Judeans deported to Babylon by King Nebuchadnezzar (2 Kings 24:10-17). He was approximately twenty-five years old at the time. Even though he had the same role as Jeremiah, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah, Ezekiel's ministry was unique among the Old Testament prophets in that it took place entirely in Babylon. Similar to Jeremiah, Ezekiel faced incredible discouragement in that he proclaimed God's message with little positive response. Despite the people's present rebellion and circumstances, God promised them a future hope of restoration. This promise came in the form of a vision received by Ezekiel.

5-6. As New Testament Christians, we cannot read these verses without instinctively jumping ahead to the idea of bodily resurrection, specifically Jesus' resurrection. There is no question that the concept of bodily resurrection was present in the mind of Ezekiel. In the context of this vision, however, the resurrection imagery has to do with God's restoring, both physically and spiritually, a specific people.



99 Essential Doctrines (p. 104, DDG)

Christ as King

God has always been King over His creation, whether in heaven or on earth. Yet some of His creatures in both realms have rebelled against Him, leaving destruction in their wake. To restore His broken world, God promised a King who would deliver His people and restore all of creation. The promise of a coming King finds its fulfillment in Jesus Christ and looks forward to its perfection when Jesus returns for His bride, the church.

TEACHING PLAN

Read Ezekiel 37:16-17, 20-22.



Ezekiel's vision centered on the nation's restoration. Ezekiel was commanded by God to perform a symbolic act involving two sticks, one representing Judah, the Southern Kingdom, and the other representing Ephraim, the Northern Kingdom of Israel. It is worth noting that each inscription mentioned Israel, implying that the two kingdoms were always one people. Ezekiel joined the sticks together to create the appearance of one single stick, symbolizing God's plan to reunify the two kingdoms following their split after Solomon's death (1 Kings 12). The Lord desired to see the tribes of Israel reconciled and unified under one king, a reality that would come to pass in His timing and by His doing.

▪ What role do God's people have in living in unity with one another?

God told His people that His plan for restoration extended beyond those involved in the Babylonian captivity; it included the Israelites throughout the nations where they had been scattered, bringing them all back to their homeland. This greater gathering speaks of a future reality that goes beyond the returns from exile that happened in the days of Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah. God also reiterated His commitment to unite His people forever under one future king.

How Ezekiel interpreted this message we cannot fully know, but from our present-day vantage point, we clearly see that the vision finds its fulfillment in the promised Messiah—Jesus Christ. From a political standpoint, Israel would never again be ruled by a king. This historical fact lends greater credit to the truth that God's people would only find their full restoration in Jesus. Ezekiel knew Israel's redemption would not find its full consummation while still under Old Testament law. Rather, the prophet trusted in a day when Israel would be unified under a new covenant with new hearts (Ezek. 36:24-27; Jer. 31:31-34). This new covenant that would purify them from sin and unify them into one kingdom would be inaugurated by King Jesus. 

▪ What messages should unity among God's people communicate to the world?

Read Ezekiel 37:23-28.



Ezekiel did not know the specific details surrounding the messianic king's arrival, but as verses 23-24 suggest, he knew the coming of this king would correspond with the permanent cleansing of the people from sin. God was going to place over Israel a future Davidic king, and under this king, God's people would turn from their idolatry, be saved from their apostasies, and experience spiritual cleansing like never before. Furthermore, this king would lead them to obey the word of the Lord.

God's people would soon experience a measure of renewal in the land with a rebuilt temple, yet Israel's dry bones would not begin to experience the fullness of life until Christ ushered in the new covenant with His blood shed on the cross for the forgiveness of sins (Matt. 26:27-28). 

▪ How is Jesus' cleansing power greater than the cleansing power offered through the Old Testament sacrificial system?

COMMENTARY

Main Point:
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Ezekiel 37

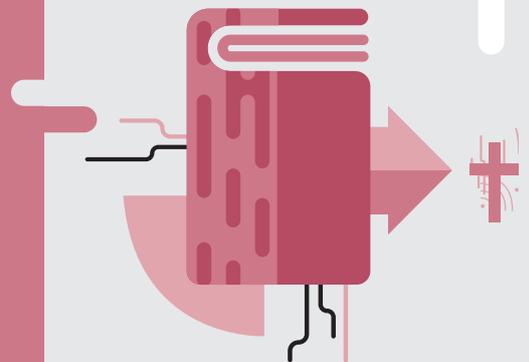
23-28. The chapter concludes with God proclaiming a permanent covenant with His people. Five times in verses 25-28 we find the Hebrew for “forever” or “permanent.” God promised to restore the people to their land forever and to construct a sanctuary that would last forever. God also promised to dwell among the people permanently—something the people only experienced intermittently in the Old Testament.

When Jesus came, He referred to His body as the temple that would be built up (John 2:19-22), a permanent dwelling of the Lord as He is God the Son. Furthermore, the Father and the Son send the Holy Spirit to dwell permanently in those who believe in Christ. Both individually and corporately, believers become the permanent dwelling place of the Lord, for the church is the body of Christ (1 Cor. 3:16; 2 Cor. 6:16-18).

It is clear in our modern eyes that the promises spoken of by Ezekiel did not find their complete fulfillment in the people's return from Babylon. Old Testament prophecies often had a short-term, limited fulfillment followed by a long-term, complete fulfillment. As it relates to Ezekiel's vision, the return to Jerusalem after the exile was only a foreshadowing of the full restoration God's people would experience through the promised King, Jesus Christ. And with His coming, the gospel is now shared among the nations that they may believe and find unity as one people of God led by the one King of God.

(p. 106, DDG) Christ Connection

God gave Ezekiel a vision of the power of God to bring life out of death and to restore a broken and scattered people. Ezekiel's vision was fulfilled ultimately in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Jesus is Immanuel—God with us—the King who gives life and rules over a unified people from every nation, tribe, people, and language (Rev. 7:9).



Our Mission

God's Story has always been designed to connect with our story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own. Suggested answers to these questions can be found on the right-hand side of the page for leaders.

Head



How does Ezekiel's vision point to the faithfulness of God to keep His promises?

Why is God's faithfulness to keep His promises good news for us today?

Heart



What does Elijah's vision communicate about the power of God's Word?

Do you engage with God's Word each week expecting it to work powerfully on your heart? If not, why?

Hands



In what ways can you seek greater unity with people in your own church?

What are some divisions threatening the church today? How might we overcome these divisions in the pursuit of unity?

Main Point:
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Head

One of the things this vision told the people is that God keeps His promises. Centuries earlier, recorded in the Book of Deuteronomy, He had promised that if His people fell into idolatry then He would bring judgment upon them (Deut. 28:32-33).

In a strange way, the exile was not just evidence of God's judgment; it was evidence of His faithfulness. If God had not kept His promise of judgment, then perhaps He would not keep His other promises either. But because God kept His word, doing exactly what He said He would do, the people could look to this vision, at this time, and know that God still keeps His promises. Here, He promised that this exile was not the end.



Heart

It is significant that life came into the valley as a result of the Word of the Lord. God's Word is filled with power, and it always has been. At the very beginning of time, it was the Word of God that brought something out of nothing. Creation is a result of God's creative word.

The hope of restoration does not belong only to the exiles living in Babylon. We claim the same hope of experiencing restoration, the restoration that comes through Jesus Christ. How are we made alive? In the New Testament, Paul reminded us that it's through hearing and believing the Word of God that we are spiritually resurrected (Rom. 10:17). When we hear the Word of the gospel spoken, something begins to happen inside of us through the work of the Holy Spirit. Our hearts, hardened because of our sin, suddenly begin to soften until we are also standing anew before God.



Hands

Reading these verses we notice the theme of God's desire for unity among His people. On the night before His crucifixion, Jesus prayed for oneness among all the believers who would follow His ministry (John 17:20-23). As we look at the fragmented state of the church today, we are reminded that this is not how it ought to be. A spiritual battle is being waged against the church. One of Satan's best tactics against the church involves fracturing Christians into different camps for the purpose of weakening unity and witness. He works hard at sowing seeds of discord in order to create wedges between believers so he can fill that space with pride and enmity. If the church is to be marked by greater unity in the decades to come, it will only be possible by the power of God and through our submission to Christ.