

THE GOSPEL PROJECT – CHRONOLOGICAL PROPHETS AND KINGS GOD THE PURSUER *God Pursues Us With New Life*

We conclude our series on Prophets and Kings with a brief look into Ezekiel, a young man from a priestly family taken into the Babylonian captivity. He like Jeremiah was destined to become a prophet of God rather than a priest. During his captivity, he was given many prophecies from the LORD. We will briefly examine just one of them where he speaks about God's Spirit bringing new life. He was deported to Babylon **after** the deportation of Daniel and **before** the actual destruction of Jerusalem. His prophecies often seemed strange and yet his words remain timely for our generation. Because of his strange visions, some would question if Ezekiel was mentally unbalanced even though his writings are orderly and his prophecies contain deep insights. Herbert Vander Lugt of Day of Discovery Ministries says of Ezekiel, "He was more than sane. He saw God and life more clearly than those who thought he was mad."

The Jews taken into captivity were treated well by the Babylonians. They had decent housing, freedom to practice their trades and work the land. Yet, they longed for home. Thinking of the people of Judah longing for their home, I am reminded that for all of God's children this world is not our home even though we do have pleasures in this life here on earth. **Hebrews 13:14 (ESV)** ¹⁴ *For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come.*

Because of Judah's continual refusal to repent of their sins and return to God, the people were carried out of their Promised Land into exile in Babylon. The prophet Jeremiah revealed that their captivity would last for 70 years. **Jeremiah 25:12 (ESV)** ¹² *Then after seventy years are completed, I will punish the king of Babylon and that nation, the land of the Chaldeans, for their iniquity, declares the LORD, making the land an everlasting waste.* This is exactly the time that the Jews were held captive. There was no way for Jeremiah to know the length of the captivity except by divine revelation from the LORD.

In Ezekiel's prophecy of the Valley of Dry Bones, he told the people of the LORD's promise to restore the land and regenerate His people. His prophecy gave them hope. We know that a remnant of the Jews did return 70 years later to the ravaged land and they did rebuild Jerusalem and the temple. Undoubtedly, those who later returned to Jerusalem would have considered their restoration to the Promised Land the new life of Ezekiel's prophecy and it was new life for them. However, none of the blessings God promised came to them at that time. In the vision of the Valley of Dry Bones, the LORD allowed Ezekiel to look through the telescope of time to see things yet to come deep into the future. Yes,

things that still have not occurred. Ezekiel explained how a virtually dead nation would one day be raised to walk in newness of life!

Some would like to make this prophecy about the salvation of individual believers and we certainly can identify with the Spirit of God being breathed into our own lives as we accept Christ as Savior. Our sins are buried with Christ and we are raised to walk in newness of life. And, we can see a picture of the bodily resurrection of believers being caught up to heaven with a new body as dry bones returning to life. However, this passage in Ezekiel was spoken specifically to God's nation of Israel. God's people are spiritually dead and scattered in exile.

Read Ezekiel 37:1-3 (ESV) 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."*



Life as Ezekiel knew it changed forever the moment he was marched away from everything he knew in Judah to Babylon. However, he still knew this: *The hand of the LORD was upon me.* And throughout his writings, we find that God's guiding hand revealed much to him. On this particular day, the Spirit brought him to a valley full of bones. Ezekiel saw the skeletons of corpses long ago decayed.

For the Jew, it was humiliating for the body of a dead Jew not to be washed, wrapped, and buried with dignity in a grave or a tomb. These that Ezekiel saw were bodies left as on the battlefield to become food for the vultures to eat and objects for the sun to bleach. The LORD had warned that this would happen. **Deuteronomy 28:25-26 (ESV)** ²⁵ *"The LORD will cause you to be defeated before your enemies. You shall go out one way against them and flee seven ways before them. And you shall be a horror to all the kingdoms of the earth. ²⁶ And your dead body shall be food for all birds of the air and for the beasts of the earth, and there shall be no one to frighten them away.* The Valley of Dry Bones represents Israel in exile caused by their own disobedience to God – lying dead in their sins. The exile of man from God first occurred in the Garden of Eden when Adam and Eve sinned causing them to be expelled from the Garden and separated from God. This means that each person born into this world continues to be separated from God, doomed to Hell, and will not be allowed to enter Heaven. However, God in His love for us, provided a way to end that exile. We are removed from exile by accepting Jesus, God's Son as our sacrifice for sin.

As Ezekiel walks among the dry and very dead human bones, the question comes from God: *Son of man, can these bones live?* The logical answer would have been NO! But, Ezekiel was wise and said: *O Lord*

GOD, you know. We know that still today the house of Israel is still dead to their own Messiah – Jesus. They will never understand the great truths of their own scripture until the power of God’s Spirit moves upon them.

God’s Word is powerful enough to bring life out of death.

Read Ezekiel 37:4-8 (ESV) 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.

In the New Testament we read in **Hebrews 4:12 (ESV)** ¹² For the word of God is living and active... Today, we know the answer to the LORD’s question to Ezekiel, ‘yes, bones dead in sin can live by the Living Word of God!’ **John 1:1, 14 (ESV)** ¹ In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... ¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us... That Word of God is Jesus. Jesus said in **John 6:63 (ESV)** ⁶³ It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. Ezekiel here in Old Testament times recognized that it is the Spirit of God who gives life; therefore, he began to prophesy as the LORD commanded him.

For those of us who have experienced the life-giving breath of God through Jesus, we should be encouraged and compelled by the actions of Ezekiel to prophesy – that is, we should proclaim the message of God concerning our risen Savior – **1 Corinthians 15:45 (ESV)** ⁴⁵ Thus it is written, “The first man Adam became a living being”; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. The disobedient first man brought us death – the obedient Jesus brings us life!

H.A. Ironside says, “As Ezekiel proclaimed the word there was a noise as of thunder and a tremendous shaking of the earth; and then, before the prophet’s startled eyes, the bones came together, each one fitted to the other, until they formed complete human skeletons. In another moment sinews and flesh came upon them and skin covered them, and they became perfect human bodies, but there was no breath or life in them.”

Read Ezekiel 37:9-10 (ESV) 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.

God commanded Ezekiel to prophesy to the wind and told him what to say. In the Hebrew language, the word *ruah* can mean wind, breath, or Spirit. Thinking back to the first Adam again. He was complete physically, but he had no life until the breath of God entered into him. **Genesis 2:7 (ESV)** ⁷ *then the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.* When Ezekiel prophesied the breath from God from the four winds entered the dead bodies and they lived and stood to their feet.

God himself explained the meaning of the vision of the valley of bones that Ezekiel saw. It was nothing outlandish. It is just another picture of God's love and power that is displayed in restoring His people.

Read Ezekiel 37:11-14 (ESV) 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."*

Ezekiel's prophecy of the Valley of Dry Bones is one of great interest among those who study biblical prophecy. In 70 AD, the Second Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed by the Roman Empire, effectively ending Jewish rule in the Promised Land until 1948 when the modern-day nation of Israel was established by the United Nations. Prior to 1948, it would have been very difficult to visualize the dry bones of Israel connecting together.

Although we do not know for certain, it is very possible that Israel once again becoming a nation in 1948 is the gathering of the dry bones that Ezekiel saw through his telescope of time. Currently, Israel has not experienced a spiritual conversion – they remain a physical body without life in the Spirit of God. When God finally breathes the breath of life into Israel and establishes them in His earthly kingdom as their Messiah, all the world will know that the God of Israel is the God of all. He deserves our worship, trust, love, and obedience because HE ALONE IS THE ONE TRUE GOD!

The God who gave Ezekiel a glimpse of His glory can do the same for us. He may not give us a vision, but He can make His power and presence real to us. The Lord Jesus, who came to reveal the Father, to die on the cross to pay the penalty for our sins, and to conquer death for us through His resurrection promised in **Matthew 28:20 (ESV)** ²⁰ *... And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.* He is with us! He gives us new life!