

The Valley of Dry Bones

Ezeki'el 37: 1-28

DIG: Hebrew uses the word ruach for wind, breath and spirit. How are these three words related (Ezeki'el 37:5, 9 and 14)? What are the two steps in raising these dead (Ezeki'el 37:7-8 and 10)? Why not do it all at once? How were the exiles feeling (Ezeki'el 37:11)? What is God telling them about the future of Isra'el? The people of Isra'el split into the northern Kingdom and southern Kingdom after the death of Solomon (First Kings 12:1-33). What is the point of Ezeki'el's stick lesson? Who will be king of the united and holy nation? When will that happen? How long will his reign last?

REFLECT: What brings you hope in a hopeless situation? When have you felt your dry bones come to life? Has ADONAI raised you from the dead? When and how did it happen? Is the Spirit of God living inside of you? Are you sure (see my commentary on The Life of Christ Bw - What God Does for Us at the Moment of Faith)?

This far eschatological prophecy was made sometime after 586 BC during the exile in Babylon

The prophecy of Isra'el's regeneration is illustrated in the most graphic manner by a vision concerning the rebirth of the nation. The prophet finds himself in a valley full of scattered bones. Under the life-giving effect of the Ruach HaKodesh, the bones knit together and are covered with ligaments, flesh and skin. Ultimately the breath of life is infused into them and they will stand as one nation. A more inspiring message could not have been communicated to the despairing exiles to revive their national will to live.

The far eschatological prophecy of the dry bones: The hand of ADONAI was upon me. These words are always the mark and the sign of a prophetic vision (Ezeki'el 1:3, 3:14 and 22, 8:1, 33:22, 40:1). The Spirit took hold of the prophet and he spoke as if in a trance although he remained in control. And what was different about this particular vision was that Ezeki'el was transported to receive special revelation. He carried me out by His Spirit and set me down in the middle of the valley where Ezeki'el saw the Shekinah glory of YHVH (Ezeki'el 3:22), and in that vision the prophet was also transported by the hand of ADONAI. But now he sees something he didn't see then; this valley was full of dry human bones (Ezeki'el 37:1 CJB). And exactly what these bones represent is explained in verse 12. This passage is not dealing with a physical resurrection of the dead (for that see the commentary on Revelation Fd - The Resurrection of the Righteous of the TaNaKh), but rather, it is merely *symbolic* of Isra'el's restoration.

There are seven different aspects of this vision:

First, what we have in these verses is not a picture of death, but a picture of dispersion.

Secondly, the bones represent both the northern kingdom of **Isra'el** and the southern kingdom of Judah, not merely the righteous of the TaNaKh as **verse 11** will make quite clear.

Thirdly, if this was a physical resurrection, how could these bones be speaking to each other if they represent the dead? It is clear that these bones are not to be taken literally as dead people, but rather, they represent the dried up hopes of the whole house of **Isra'el**.

Fourthly, **Isra'el** is pictured as dry and dead among the **Gentile nations** in **verses 12-14**. This death is pictured as spiritual death and not physical death.

Fifthly, nowhere else in the Bible is it ever taught that physical resurrection will occur in different stages. But, that is exactly what we see in this passage. Wherever the Bible describes a physical resurrection, it happens instantaneously, not in stages. Yet **Isra'el's** restoration will come in five specific stages (**Ezeki'el 36:24-28**). And what we see in the **valley of dry bones** is merely a vision of these same five stages in a more symbolic state.

Sixthly, we should note that the Bible does not teach a general resurrection. It clearly makes a distinction between the resurrection of the righteous (see the commentary on **Revelation Ff - Blessed and Holy are those Who Have Part in the First Resurrection**) and another resurrection of the wicked (see the commentary on **Revelation Fn - The Second Resurrection**) separated by a thousand years. But in this passage they are all resurrected at the same time.

Lastly, the context of this chapter emphasizes the symbolic. No one questions that the **two sticks of wood** are symbolic of the two houses of **Isra'el**. **Ezeki'el himself** makes that statement. The symbol of **dry bones** is seen in **verses 1-14** and the symbol of **two sticks** is seen in **verses 15-20**, therefore the context of **Chapter 37** is symbolism.

Ezeki'el was told to walk around the whole area in order to survey the situation very carefully. **He had me pass by all around them - there were very many bones lying in the valley, and they were so dry! The flesh was gone, showing how hopeless the nation's' situation was. The rabbis teach that the matter of contracting ritual defilement did not arise with Ezekiel, since the experience was not real, but only a vision.** The LORD asked me, "Son of man, can these bones live?" I answered Him, "Adonai ELOHIM! Only you know that!" **It was, and is, beyond human power to make dry bones live. Only the LORD, if He desires, can do it.** Then He said to me: **Prophecy over these bones!** **Ezeki'el** said to

them: Dry bones! Hear what YHVH has to say! Adonai ELOHIM says to you: I will make My breath [ruach] enter you, and you will live. That is a divine promise. They will live only through the power of God. I will attach ligaments to you, make flesh grow over you, cover you with skin and put My breath [ruach] in you. The result will be that the nation becomes spiritually alive. You will live, and you will know that I am ADONAI' (Ezeki'el 37:2-6 CJB).” There will be stages to the restoration. The first regathering in unbelief in preparation for the judgment of the Great Tribulation will be followed later by the worldwide regathering in faith in preparation for the blessings of the messianic Kingdom. In symbolic form, both worldwide regatherings are blended together.

The fulfillment of the prophecy: This prophecy will be fulfilled in two stages. So I prophesied as ordered. And while I was prophesying, in the first stage, there was a noise, a rattling sound; it was the bones coming together, each bone in its proper place. As I watched, ligaments grew on them, flesh appeared and skin covered them; but there was no breath in them (Ezeki'el 37:7-8 CJB). This pictures Isra'el's worldwide regathering in unbelief. May 14, 1948, after World War II and the holocaust, the state of Isra'el was created in unbelief in preparation for the judgment of the Great Tribulation.

Then next, is the second stage, God said to Ezeki'el, “Prophecy to the breath [ruach]! Prophecy, son of man! Say to the breath [ruach] that Adonai ELOHIM says: Come from the four winds [ruach], breath [ruach]; and breathe [ruach] on these slain so that they can live.” So I prophesied as ordered, and breath [ruach] came into them, and they were spiritually alive! They figuratively stood up on their feet, a huge army (Ezeki'el 37:9-10 CJB). Ruach can be translated as wind, spirit and breath. So Isra'el will be regenerated (see the commentary on Revelation Ev - The Basis for the Second Coming of Jesus Christ). Therefore, the second stage symbolizes the second worldwide regathering of the nation of Isra'el in faith, and all Isra'el will be saved (Romans 11:26a), in preparation for the blessings of the messianic Kingdom.

The meaning of the vision: Then He said to me, “Son of man! These bones are the whole house of Isra'el; both the northern kingdom of Isra'el and the southern kingdom of Judah, spiritually destroyed, desolate and dead. But these bones are not the literal bones of dead Jews, but rather, they are symbolic, representing the national return of the whole house of Isra'el. And what are they complaining about? They are saying: Our bones have dried up, our hope is gone, and we are completely cut off. They had lost hope because they had no homeland. The fact that they are able to communicate with each other in this dried up state proves that this passage is not dealing with individual regeneration but national restoration. Then YHVH responds to Isra'el loss of hope with a promise.

Therefore, prophesy; say to the dry bones that Adonai ELOHIM says: My people! I will open your graves symbolically, and make you get up out of them, and I will bring you into the land of Isra'el. This completes the first regathering in unbelief in preparation for the judgment of the Great Tribulation. Then you will know that I am ADONAI - when I have opened your graves and made you get up out of your graves, my people! I will put My Spirit [Ruach HaKodesh] in you; and you will be alive. Then I will place you in your own Land; and you will know that I, ADONAI, have spoken, and that I have done it, says ADONAI (Ezeki'el 37:12-14 CJB). This completes the second regathering in faith in preparation for the blessings of **the messianic Kingdom**. **When the miracle of Isra'el's national restoration is achieved, the people's faith in God will be firmly established.**

In the second half of the chapter, Ezekiel prophesies the reunion of the northern kingdom of Isra'el and the southern kingdom of Judah that will be ruled by one king of the house of David during **the messianic Kingdom**.³⁷¹

The united and holy nation during the messianic Kingdom: The prophecy of national regeneration, as symbolized in the vision of the dry bones, is followed by the symbolic action of the reunion of the two Kingdoms. The word of ADONAI came to me saying: You, son of man, take a stick of wood and write on it, "Belonging to Judah and the tribe of Benjamin forming the southern Kingdom." Then take another stick of wood, and write on it, "Belonging to Joseph (that is to Ephraim) and the other nine tribes forming the northern Kingdom." Join them together into one stick so that they will become one in your hand (Ezeki'el 37:15-17). This caused the people to ask certain questions.

Then the prophet was to explain to the exiles the meaning of the symbol while holding the two sticks in his hand. We can see that there was a change of attitude on the part of the people. He was no longer being made fun of or ignored, but taken quite seriously. So when he performs a symbolic act the people are quick to ask what it means. When your people ask you what all this means, tell them that Adonai ELOHIM says this: I am going to take the stick of Joseph - which is in Ephraim's hand - and of the other nine Israelite tribes associated with him, and join it to Judah's stick. I will make them into a single stick of wood, and they will become one in My hand. Hold before their eyes the sticks you have written on (Ezeki'el 37:18-20). The northern tribe of Isra'el and the southern kingdom of Judah will become one nation again.

And say to them that Adonai ELOHIM says: I will take the Israelites out of the [Gentile] nations where they have gone. I will gather them from every side and bring them back into their own Land. I will make them one nation in the Land, on the mountains of Isra'el (Jeremiah 3:18). There will be one king over all of them and they will never again be two nations or be divided into two kingdoms (First Chronicles 17:21).

There will be a **cleansing** that will lead to a permanent salvation. They will no longer defile themselves with their idols and vile images or with any of their offenses, for I will save them from all the places where they have been living and sinning, and I will cleanse them. They will be My people, and I will be their God (Ezeki'el 37:21-23).

King David during the messianic Kingdom: My servant David will be king over them, and they will all have one shepherd (see the commentary on **Revelation Fi - The Government of the Messianic Kingdom**). He will guide Isra'el and he will feed Isra'el. Never again will Isra'el have a shepherd who will lead them astray. They will follow my rulings and keep and observe My regulations. **The purified and restored Isra'el will never again be uprooted from their soil, but they will live in the Land that ADONAI gave to His servant Jacob, the Land where their ancestors lived. They and their children will live there forever and David, YHVH's servant, will be their prince throughout the messianic Kingdom. From the viewpoint of Isra'el, David is their king; but from the viewpoint of Christ, David is His prince (Ezeki'el 37:24-25).**

Ezekiel concludes his prophecy describing the messianic Temple. **I will make a covenant of peace with them; it will be an everlasting covenant and the basis for the new messianic Temple (see Ep - The Days are Coming, declares the LORD, When I Will Make a New Covenant with the People of Isra'el).** I will establish them in the Land and increase their numbers, and I will put My Holy Place among them for a thousand years (see the commentary on **Isaiah Db - The Nine Missing Articles in Messiah's Coming Temple**). My dwelling place will be like a canopy over Isra'el (Isaiah 4:5-6). And the result will be, I will be their God, and they will be My people. Then the [Gentile] nations will know that I am ADONAI, who sets Isra'el apart as holy, when My Holy Place is with them for the duration of **the messianic Kingdom (Ezeki'el 37:26-28).** The prophet will have much more to say about the millennial Temple in **Chapters 40-48.**³⁷²