

Explore the Bible: January 9

Offers • Ezekiel 37:1-14

By Wayne VanHorn



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“God is in the life-giving business,” my pastor Nolan Houston often said. Today’s lesson is an enacted parable of that great truth.

God allowed Ezekiel to envisage dry bones come to life – a metaphor for new life, both physical and spiritual. Specifically, Ezekiel’s message applied to the renewal of God’s people living in the Promised Land after their long exile in Babylon.

The spiritual truth of the lesson is valid for all time. God is able to bring dead things to life again.

The Potential (Ezek. 37:1-6). God made Ezekiel aware of the vastness and seeming finality of death by taking him to a valley “full with bones” (37:1; CSB). Ezekiel confessed, “The hand of the Lord was upon me,” indicating the direct presence of the covenant God, Yahweh.

Thus, the vision of dry bones is immediately stamped with covenant significance. Lead by the Lord Himself, Ezekiel noted the great number of bones and the fact that those bones were “very dry” (37:2). The description, “very dry,” indicates not only death but also that the decay process had been completed.

God startled the prophet by asking, "Can these bones live?" (37:3). Ezekiel acknowledged the improbability of the question by replying, "Lord God, only you know." The skeptical prophet avoided overtly stating the impossibility of dry bones coming to life.

The dry bones symbolized God's covenant people with whom He was not finished! Thus, God commanded Ezekiel to prophesy concerning the bones (His people) to "hear the word of the Lord" (37:4).

In Ezekiel 37:4-5, the prophecy twice contains the word, "breath," forming a small *inclusio* for the revitalization of the Hebrew people. In both uses of breath, there is the promise that "you will live" (37:5), or "you will come to life" (37:6).

Between the two appearances of "breath," the Lord describes the process of joining the bones with tendons, making flesh grow, and covering the body with skin again.

The Presentation (Ezek. 37:7-10). Ezekiel obeyed God; he prophesied. As he spoke, he heard "a noise, a rattling sound," as the bones came together. The promised tendons appeared on them, as did the flesh and skin. Yet, the reconstituted bodies were lifeless, because there was no breath in them (37:8).

The Hebrews who heard the prophecy would have remembered Genesis 2:7, where the lifeless clay became a living soul only after God "breathed into his nostrils the breath of life."

Ezekiel 37:9 has a word play based on the Hebrew noun, *ruach*, which can be translated as wind, breath, or spirit. The CSB version translates the word as "breath." Other translations render the term as "wind (KJV)." The basic truth is that God is the source of living air in our lungs. The reconstituted bodies come back to life only when the life-giving breath or wind entered them.

Once again, Ezekiel obediently prophesied. As a result, “the breath came into them.” “They lived, and stood upon their feet” (37:10). God demonstrated His unique power to bring life out of death, a foreshadowing of the resurgence of the Hebrew people as well as for the New Testament church in the course of time. The large group of revitalized, resurrected bodies comprised “a vast army.”

The Promise (Ezek. 37:11-14). On one occasion when I was buying a diamond ring for my wife, I noticed the jeweler placed a black cloth on the counter before showing me the jewelry. The splendor of the diamond was enhanced when viewed against the black cloth.

In the same way, God’s promise seems all the more powerful when considered against the black cloth of Israel’s despair in exile. The people lamented, “Our bones are dried up, and our hope has perished; we are cut off (37:11).” Their lot was one of utter hopelessness.

In Ezekiel 37:12-14, God commands the prophet to prophesy concerning His promise to His despairing people. He promised to open their graves and to bring them up to life. With that promise came the additional promise that He would lead them “into the land of Israel (37:12).” Moreover, the Lord would put His spirit (*ruach*) in them, resulting in life (37:14).

The statement, “You will know that I am the Lord,” occurs three times in Ezekiel 37 and 26 times in the entire book (37:6,13,14). Thus, the importance of God’s people knowing Him – His love, His life-giving power, and His covenant – are of paramount significance.

Truly, God offers life to whomever believes.

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