

The Visions of Ezekiel

Lesson 29

Ezekiel's Fifty-sixth Assignment from the LORD

6. The Way of the Salvation of Israel (37:1-28)

a) The Prophet Among the Bones (37:1)

37:1 The hand of the LORD was upon me, and He brought me out by the Spirit of the LORD and set me down in the middle of the valley; and it was full of bones.

Alas, Ezekiel found himself brought by the Spirit of the LORD to the valley full of bones. First, Ezekiel was not in the valley just as he did not make a physical trip to Jerusalem in vision two. He was in the valley in Spirit in the vision. It was an imaginary valley that would represent the whole nation of Israel. We see *"it was full of bones."* Not half full. Not over full. It was completely full. Every bone that was supposed to be in that valley was in the valley.

b) The Prophet Between the Bones (37:2)

37:2 He caused me to pass among them round about, and behold, there were very many on the surface of the valley; and lo, they were very dry.

The Spirit of the LORD caused Ezekiel to inspect the bones – all of them. He found that they were *"very dry."* We might suppose that even the marrow within had leached completely out of every bone. No moisture could be found within. Perhaps Ezekiel saw that they were so dry that they were brittle and ripe at the point where they would begin to turn to dust. Once turned to dust, they would not be recognizable as bones any longer – just a trail of calcium and phosphate.

c) The Prophet Concerning the Bones (37:3)

37:3 He said to me, "Son of man, can these bones live?" And I answered, "O Lord GOD, You know."

Ah! Ezekiel was not to be tricked by a question from the LORD. He did not know the answer, but he knew the LORD knew whether or not these bones could live again.

d) The Prophets Instruction to the Bones (37:4-6)

(1) Listen Up Old Bones (37:4)

37:4 Again He said to me, "Prophesy over these bones and say to them, 'O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD.'

Today, in our American lingo, we could hear the LORD say to Ezekiel, "Yes, I know whether or not these bones can live again, but I want you to know. Speak to them and tell them to listen up old dry bones." Looking man-ward, we know enough that dry dead bones cannot hear. Looking God-ward, we know that the LORD can make even the dead live; therefore, for the bones to hear was not too big a deal.

(2) Take a Breath Old Bones (37:5)

37:5 "Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones, 'Behold, I will cause breath to enter you that you may come to life.

Can you imagine Ezekiel's thought when the LORD stated he was going to cause breath to enter the dead dry bones? Where were the lungs? Where was the skin? Where was all the soft tissue? Basically, the LORD told the dry bones to "take a breath!" Can you imagine that? Oh, but, the LORD already knew what it took to give life to all the dry bones in that valley.

(3) Put on Skin Old Bones (37:6)

37:6 'I will put sinews on you, make flesh grow back on you, cover you with skin and put breath in you that you may come alive; and you will know that I am the LORD.'"

Notice the progress of the LORD's actions to bring the bones to life – sinews, flesh, skin, breath. It would not work any other way. First, the sinews would begin to grow; they are the ligaments that hold the whole set of 206 bones of a human skeleton. Second would come the flesh; that is what we call the muscular system that attaches to the bones and ligaments complete with arterial, venous, lymph and organ systems. Third, the whole envelope that encapsulates the sinews and flesh would begin to appear that we call skin; it includes the dermis, epidermis, cutis and cuticle. Fourth and finally, the bodies of each original bone in the valley were ready for the miraculous life-giving element that can only come from the LORD - the breath. The LORD said He would "*put breath in you that you may come alive....*" No breath from the LORD, no life. But at this point in the story, Ezekiel is simply speaking to a valley full of dry bones.

e) The Prophets Prophecy to the Bones (37:7)

(1) What the Prophet Heard (37:7)

37:7 So I prophesied as I was commanded; and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and behold, a rattling; and the bones came together, bone to its bone.

For twelve years Ezekiel had spoken every word faithfully that the LORD had told him to say. And why not? His tongue was fastened in his mouth for those twelve years and he could not say anything except the words of the LORD. What did Ezekiel do? He told us. "*So I prophesied as I was commanded*" And when he prophesied, the LORD began to fulfill His promise. Ezekiel could hear the rattling of the bones as they began to move and find their mates, every "*bone to its bone.*" For every skeleton, 206 specific bones found the skeletons they specifically belonged to.

(2) What the Prophet Saw (37:8)

37:8 And I looked, and behold, sinews were on them, and flesh grew and skin covered them; but there was no breath in them.

Surely enough, Ezekiel saw the sinews, flesh and skin, but those three do not indicate life. Dead bodies have the same – they do not have life. Once dead, not one cell of your body continues to function. Some say that the hair and nails continue to grow but that is not the case. As the dead bodies begin to dry up, the moisture leaves, the skin shrinks exposing the nail beds and hair follicles that required new nail and hair growth to push them out. The only way for new growth to occur is for the body to take a breath of life that can only come from the LORD.

(3) What the Prophet Said (37:9-10)

37:9 Then He said to me, "Prophecy 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 come to life.'" 37:10 **So I prophesied as He commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they came to life and stood on their feet, an exceedingly great army.**

The LORD allowed Ezekiel to make the pronouncement of life and breath. What a privilege! Ezekiel did as he was instructed, saying, "*Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain, that they come to life.*" And the dry bones that had grown sinews, flesh and skin "*came to life and stood on their feet....*" Notice the inclusion of three little words, "*on these slain.*" These men, this "*exceedingly great army*" of men, had been killed and were dead. Their skin had rotted off, their flesh and sinews had deteriorated and turned to dust and just the bones had been left on the ground to decay. At the time that Ezekiel had been taken to this specific valley filled with these specific bones, the bones were exceedingly dry and almost at the point of falling apart. But, the LORD is never late and He would never let the bones get to the point that He could not use them to teach Ezekiel the lesson of the day. But to whom did these bones belong?

(4) What the Prophet Learned (37:11-14)

(a) The Bones of Israel Rotten (37:11)

37:11 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 has perished. We are completely cut off.'

These bones, standing alive in the valley, covered with new sinews, flesh and skin belonged to the *whole house of Israel*. That is what the prophet learned that day, but surely the bones of the *whole house of Israel* could not be rotten. The *house of Judah* that had just been taken into exile was not rotten, she was the house of Jews saved as the remnant for the future. She was made up of people from the Southern Kingdom who had followed the laws, commands and ordinances of the LORD and called upon His name for Salvation. The southern house was not dead and rotten. As for the *house of Israel*, the Northern Kingdom exiles, that was a different story. They were rotten and the LORD had spent much of His time in Ezekiel's ministry prosecuting them. But whole means whole and Ezekiel could not have seen that the *whole house of Israel* was rotten at that time and it was not. For those in exile, the hope of the future had not perished at the time of this prophecy. They had been promised a return to the Promised Land. In fact, for those in exile, life was not nearly as hard as it had been in the old Northern and Southern Kingdoms. Those of the north who were taken into exile under the Assyrians found themselves sought out for counsel by the Assyrian kings. How could that be? In the Babylonian Empire, the best and the learned young men of the Southern Kingdom were put in charge of the administration of the empire. How could that be? If the exiles felt like they had been cut off from the LORD at this point in the delivery of the prophecy, it was news to them because they were alive and well cared for. So, when will the *whole house of Israel* say, "*Our bones are dried up and our hope has perished. We are completely cut off...*"? For the bones to be dried up, it means that the *whole house of Israel* must be dead. When did she die as a nation? At this point in the prophecy, she had recognized that she was dead, but when did she die? When did Israel come to the point in her history when her hope had perished? Not yet! Not at all, even to today! She is not there yet in her mind. In Ezekiel's day, she was not dead. When she returned to the Promised Land in 536 BC, she was not dead. When the last book of the Old Testament was written in chronological order, Malachi, she was not dead. But when the LORD Jehovah, the LORD Jesus, made His appearance in the flesh as the promised Messiah of the *whole house of Israel*, the whole house rejected Him as Savior and that was when the *whole house of Israel* died. Since that time, her skin, flesh and sinews had rotted and the bones that were left were drying out – very dry. She was dead in her relationship with the LORD of all creation. This prophecy came after she had been sabotaged by her cousins the Edomites. This prophecy came as an example of what the LORD will do for the *whole house of Israel* when He takes away her heart of stone and gives her a heart of flesh and a new spirit within. This prophecy is an application of the story delivered in last week's lesson in chapter 36:16-38. At some time in the future, Israel will go through a cleaning and the LORD will breathe a new breath into her when she finally accepts Him as her Messiah. Her bones will rise from her living graves!

(b) The Bones of Israel Risen (37:12-13)

37:12 "Therefore prophesy and say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "Behold, I will open your graves and cause you to come up out of your graves, My people; and I will bring you into the land of Israel. 37:13 "Then you will know that I am the LORD, when I have opened your graves and caused you to come up out of your graves, My people.

When the *whole nation of Israel* rejected the LORD at His first coming, she became dead in her trespasses and sins. She was alive in the Mosaic Law until that point, but when the LORD came, He fulfilled that Law and issued in a new time of grace in the age of the Church. Israel missed the fulfillment. Israel missed the change. Israel missed her Savior. Israel missed her salvation. But not all! For the Church in the beginning was primarily made up of Jews from the *whole house of Israel*, but the leaders of that same house did not grasp the importance of their Savior and accept Him. At that moment, the *whole house of Israel*, living without Jesus, died a spiritual death and entered into a spiritual grave. Although the nation of Israel is still a living nation today, she is a dead nation in the LORD's plan. Dead bones – dry bones!

(c) The Bones of Israel Revived (37:14)

37:14 "I will put My Spirit within you and you will come to life, and I will place you on your own land. Then you will know that I, the LORD, have spoken and done it," declares the LORD."

In the middle of the time of Israel's struggle, in the middle of the seven-year peace treaty with the Revived Roman Empire which Ezekiel's counterpart in Babylon will call the beast, Israel will be cleansed and receive the LORD's Spirit, the Holy Spirit that will bring the living dead of the *whole house of Israel* to life once again in a right relationship with Him. She will finally be through with her struggle with God. Did you know that that was her name? Israel. *Isra* means *struggle with*. *El* means *God*. The very name of Israel means *struggle with God*. It has been and will continue to be the theme of the *whole nation of Israel* until she accepts the LORD Jesus as her Savior in the middle of her time of tribulation in the end. But at the time of this prophecy to Ezekiel, the ten tribes of the Northern Kingdom and the three tribes of the Southern Kingdom were still at odds with each other, even while living together in exile. Between the two there were two different mindsets. Together they may have been the *whole house of Israel*, but truly not one nation in word and deed. That point has been clearly made through the prophecies to Ezekiel in this book. The *house of Israel* was primarily chastised by the LORD in these twelve visions and the *house of Judah* was primarily praised.

(5) What the Prophet Did (37:15-28)

(a) Two Separate Sticks (37:15-16)

(i) A Stick for Judah (37:15-16a)

37:15 The word of the LORD came again to me saying, 37:16a "And you, son of man, take for yourself one stick and write on it, 'For Judah and for the sons of Israel, his companions'; then take another stick and write on it,

The once great and mighty kingdom of Israel, divided upon the death of Solomon, needed to be brought back together and only the LORD could heal such a wound. The two nations needed a healing and for that they needed to leave their homes and go to a place where the great Physician could prescribe a healing regimen. Two prescriptions would be needed for a full healing – one for Judah and one for Joseph. Each prescription would be represented by a stick that Ezekiel would take and hold in his hand. It was time for the prophet to play act once again in the sight of the *houses of Judah and Israel*.

First, we come to the stick *"For Judah and for the sons of Israel, his companions..."* (37:16a). On that stick we see the phrase that Ezekiel was to write. What did it mean?

After the death of Solomon, his son, Rehoboam, clearly a fool as his father feared, insulted ten of the tribes of Israel. The LORD knew this was going to happen and he had prepared Jeroboam I to be the first king of the northern ten tribes. When the last straw was added to the pile by Rehoboam, ten tribes formed the Northern Kingdom. As a result, the tribe of Judah, the tribe of David, Solomon and Rehoboam was left in Jerusalem. But Judah was not alone. Two other sons of Israel remained with Judah in the new Southern Kingdom. The first was the tribe of Benjamin. We regularly speak of the Southern Kingdom consisting of two tribes, Judah and Benjamin, which is technically correct; however, those two were joined by another tribe of the sons of Israel – Levi. The Levites remained in the Southern Kingdom, not because they sided with Rehoboam and the tribe of Judah, but because they were servants of the Temple and stayed there in service to the LORD. And so we find the tribe of Judah joined by two companions in his kingdom – Benjamin and Levi.

(ii) A Stick for Joseph (37:16b)

37:16b 'For Joseph, the stick of Ephraim and all the house of Israel, his companions.'

Second, we come to the stick, *"For Joseph, the stick of Ephraim and all the house of Israel, his companions."* Joseph was a son of Israel, but he did not have a tribe named after him. Rather, two tribes were named after his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim. Manasseh was the oldest and should have received the blessing as the oldest, but Jacob crossed his arms, placed his right hand on Ephraim and gave him the blessing as if he were the oldest when he was not. With the division of Solomon's kingdom under the leadership of Rehoboam, the tribe of Ephraim became the lead nation. Jeroboam I, the first and new king of the Northern Kingdom was an Ephraimite. The tribal land of Ephraim held the capital city of the kingdom. Early in the development of the Northern Kingdom, it was often called Ephraim instead of Israel. We can find that recorded in Hosea 5:3, 5, and 11-14. With Ephraim we can name all the rest of the *house of Israel* as his companions – Dan, Gad, Simeon, Reuben, Issachar, Zebulun, Naphtali, Ashur and Manasseh.

If we take a moment to count the listed tribes of the kingdoms of Judah and Ephraim, we find three in the Southern Kingdom and ten in the Northern – thirteen tribes in all. But Jacob had only twelve sons and the name Joseph is missing. The LORD had promised Joseph a double blessing in the His kingdom. To make that happen, Joseph's descendants were not given his name as one tribe. Rather, Joseph's two sons would be the fathers of tribes to fulfill the promise of the double blessing. But in the LORD's plan, only twelve tribes would exist. To fulfill that prophecy, at Mount Sinai, the LORD directed the tribe of Levi to be His priests. Levi would never own land of its own in the Promised Land. He and his descendants would forever be servants in the Temple and that will still be true when the LORD reigns in His millennial Temple for 1,000 years.

(b) Two Joined Sticks (37:17)

(i) Unity in the Nation (37:17)

(a) What God Said to Ezekiel (37:17-19)

37:17 "Then join them for yourself one to another into one stick, that they may become one in your hand. 37:18 "When the sons of your people speak to you saying, 'Will you not declare to us what you mean by these?' 37:19 say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "Behold, I will take the stick of Joseph, which is in the hand of Ephraim, and the tribes of Israel, his companions; and I will put them with it, with the stick of Judah, and make them one stick, and they will be one in My hand.'"

The LORD forewarned Ezekiel that people from both kingdoms would question him when he joined the two sticks into just one of his hands. Judah and Ephraim were so used to being separate

kingdoms that they could not feasibly conceive that they would ever be a united nation again. But they would, when the LORD would bring them together in His hand as one. For that, Ezekiel would need further instruction in order to explain the LORD's plan for the divided kingdoms. That it was the LORD's plan did not mean that the two kingdoms would quickly warm up to this prophecy of their future.

(b) What Ezekiel Said to Israel (37:20-21)

**37:20 "The sticks on which you write will be in your hand before their eyes.
37:21 "Say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "Behold, I will take the sons of Israel from among the nations where they have gone, and I will gather them from every side and bring them into their own land;**

Just forty-nine years after this vision, the *whole house of Israel* would have the opportunity to return to the Promised Land at the instruction of Cyrus the Great, the king of the Medes and the Persians. However, the instruction was not mandatory; the Jews could stay in the areas where they had been exiled or they could return to their Promised Land. Only a small percentage of the Jews, from all the tribes in exile from the Northern and Southern Kingdoms returned to Jerusalem and began to repopulate the Promised Land that was controlled by the Medo-Persians, then the Greeks, then the Romans, then the Muslims, and then Britain before Israel would once again own its own land beginning in 1948 AD. Even today, Jews are still scattered throughout the countries of the world in varying size populations within each. Therefore, the return under Cyrus' order could not fulfill the prophecy of this vision. For that, we must look into the future to the time when the LORD will be making the last preparations to leave heaven and return to earth at His Second Coming.

(ii) The Unity in One King (37:22-28)

(a) A Kingdom United (37:22)

37:22 and I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel; and one king will be king for all of them; and they will no longer be two nations and no longer be divided into two kingdoms.

Now we come to the LORD's description of the future kingdom of Israel under one king. It will be a United Kingdom, one nation, one King over all Israel and it "*will no longer be two nations and no longer be divided into two kingdoms*" (37:22). The last king of any of the tribes of Israel was Zedekiah and he was currently living in exile somewhere in Nebuchadnezzar's Babylonian Empire. To this day, Israel has not had another king as the LORD promised in this vision in chapter 34. Israel will not ever have another king until One King becomes her King in the future. It will be a kingdom united under Jesus at His Second Coming.

(b) A Kingdom Delivered (37:23)

37:23 "They will no longer defile themselves with their idols, or with their detestable things, or with any of their transgressions; but I will deliver them from all their dwelling places in which they have sinned, and will cleanse them. And they will be My people, and I will be their God.

Besides being a kingdom united, it will be a kingdom delivered. Delivered from all her sins that she had committed in the Northern and Southern Kingdoms which caused the LORD to send both into exile. The LORD "*will cleanse them*" in that day when He is finally Israel's God and Israel is finally His faithful people.

(c) A Kingdom Controlled (37:24)

37:24 "My servant David will be king over them, and they will all have one shepherd; and they will walk in My ordinances and keep My statutes and observe them.

The united and delivered kingdom will be a kingdom controlled. The LORD speaks, "*My servant David will be king over them...*" How can David be the king when the LORD will be King in His millennial kingdom. To add to that, David had been dead for 583 years at the time of this prophecy. We have no problem with a resurrected David serving in the LORD's kingdom. We have a problem with "*he will be king.*" Contemporary prophets and corroborating accounts of the testimonies of the writers of the books compiled in the Bible do not indicate that David "*will be king*" in that coming day but identify him as the David who was their king.

To prove that point we first look at the words of Jeremiah who said, "But they shall serve the LORD their God and David their king, whom I will raise up for them" *Jeremiah 30:9*. Among all the Davids of the world, the LORD makes sure the Israelite kingdom will know it was their David risen from the grave who once again led them.

Second, we look at the beginning of this vision where the LORD said through Ezekiel, "And I, the LORD, will be their God, and My servant David will be prince among them; I the LORD have spoken" (34:24). Here David is not to be the king but the prince under the king.

Third, in the prophecies of Hosea the LORD said, "Afterward the sons of Israel will return and seek the LORD their God and David their king; and they will come trembling to the LORD and to His goodness in the last days" (Hosea 3:5). Once again, the David who will be with the *whole house of Israel* will be, not just any David, but the David who had been their king.

If we look at the Hebrew, it says, *וְעַלֵּיהֶם מֶלֶךְ דָּוִד וְעַבְדִּי*. We would read the Hebrew as *wa-'ab-di da-wid me-lek 'al-le-hem*, or in English as *And My servant David king over them*. The Hebrew does not indicate that David "*will be king*;" rather, in this structure the LORD simply identified His servant as the David who had been their king – King David.

Moving on in the Scripture we find that the united millennial kingdom "will all have one shepherd..."(37:24). We call the LORD the Good Shepherd and He is rightfully that. But the context of this passage is not a reference to the LORD; it is a reference to David who had been her king. He was the shepherd king, the only truly experienced shepherd of all the kings of all of Israel's history. At this point in Ezekiel's testimony, placing David as the one shepherd in the millennial kingdom seems odd and frankly against all conventional thinking based on a limited study of God's Word and limited study of Ezekiel's record; however, once we traverse chapters 40 – 48 of vision 13, we will clearly understand that the LORD will be the King of kings and Israel's God with David as the LORD's prince and shepherd of the people.

But all the people of the world, including the United Kingdom of Israel in the millennial time will be following the LORD's ordinances and statutes to the letter, not David's. At that time, David will shepherd the LORD's people in following the control of the law of the LORD.

(d) A Kingdom Timed (37:25)

37:25 "They will live on the land that I gave to Jacob My servant, in which your fathers lived; and they will live on it, they, and their sons and their sons' sons, forever; and David My servant will be their prince forever.

The united, delivered and controlled kingdom dwelling on the Promised Land will be a kingdom that will last forever. "...and they will live on it, they, and their sons and their sons' sons, forever; and David My servant will be their prince forever" (37:25). And we have just seen that clarifying phrase, "...David My servant will be their prince forever." In the millennial kingdom David will not be the king; that was what he was when he was alive in human flesh. But as a resurrected man in a glorified, justified and sanctified body, he will be the "prince forever" under King Jesus.

(e) A Kingdom Promised (37:26a)

37:26a "I will make a covenant of peace with them; it will be an everlasting covenant with them."

The kingdom will be a kingdom promised. What is the promise? It will be a kingdom of everlasting peace! For a fact, Israel had never in her existence experienced true peace for very long. But with the LORD as King she will finally know an everlasting peace and that promise is a covenant from the LORD. Nothing Israel can do will ever cause the LORD to break that covenant promise.

(f) A Kingdom Multiplied (37:26b)

37:26b "And I will place them and multiply them,

In last week's lesson we learned that the estimated world population of Jews today is about 14,346,900 people. But the whole Promised Land that stretched from the Nile to the Euphrates Rivers can house this new kingdom of Israel in the millennial many hundreds of times over. This promise of the growth of the *whole house of Israel* is part of the promised covenant of the LORD.

(g) A Kingdom Housed (37:26c-27)

37:26c-27 and will set My sanctuary in their midst forever. My dwelling place also will be with them; and I will be their God, and they will be My people.

And now we come to the kingdom with the LORD's house sitting among the whole house of Israel where He says, "I will be their God, and they will be My people" (37:27). Sadly, we must report, He is not their God today. They missed Him when He came to be their Savior. They rejected Him then and they reject Him now. That was not the case at the time of the giving of this vision 12. For the Southern Kingdom exiles, He was their hope. But not so for the Northern Kingdom exiles, they had grown cold to him unlike their forefathers who were taken off the Promised Land by the Assyrian Empire. In many cases we might call them apostate exiles – that would be a good term for them. For that the LORD had prosecuted them severely in these visions. But then, with the LORD living in their midst for all eternity, He will be housed with them as their God in their homeland promised to them since the days of their father Abraham.

(h) A Kingdom Indwelled (37:28)

37:28 "And the nations will know that I am the LORD who sanctifies Israel, when My sanctuary is in their midst forever.""

And in that day, the millennial Israel will be a kingdom indwelled by the LORD. His new Temple will be "*in their midst forever.*" What could be better? They will not be able to ignore Him or His Temple as He will finally be their focus forever! But more than that, the nations of this world that generations after generations have sought to destroy the chosen people of the LORD, will know, once and for all that all the promises recorded in the testimonies of over 40 men recorded over a period of about 1500 years were true in every word and had, for the most part, been fulfilled. What do we mean when we say, "the most part?" In short, even with the fulfillment of the LORD's promise to reign for 1,000 years as King of kings and LORD of lords, when that 1,000 years is complete, a few more Scriptural prophecy promises will still remain to be fulfilled. What will they be? We will surely see before the end of vision 13. However, this twelfth vision is not complete. At the time of the cleansing of the *whole house of Israel* recorded at this point in the vision, the LORD must describe a battle that will come against Israel which will be part of His plan to bring her to accept Him as her LORD – brought to life from her state of dry bones. It will be the war we will call the Battle of Gog. It will precipitate Israel's sanctification.