

# Dem Dry Bones

## And the Power of the Resurrection

**3** **37** 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. <sup>2</sup>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. <sup>3</sup>And he said to me, "Son of man, can these bones live?" And I answered, "O Lord God, you know." <sup>4</sup>Then he said to me, "Prophecy over these bones, and say to them, O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. <sup>5</sup>Thus says the Lord God to these bones: Behold, I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. <sup>6</sup>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." <sup>7</sup>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. <sup>8</sup>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.

<sup>9</sup>Then he said to me, "Prophecy to the breath; prophecy, 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." <sup>10</sup>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.

<sup>11</sup>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.' <sup>12</sup>Therefore prophecy, 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. <sup>13</sup>And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves, and raise you from your graves, O my people. <sup>14</sup>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."

<sup>15</sup>The word of the Lord came to me: <sup>16</sup>"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.' <sup>17</sup>And join them one to another into one stick, that they may become one in your hand. <sup>18</sup>And when your people say to you, 'Will you not tell us what you mean by these?' <sup>19</sup>say to them, Thus says the Lord God: Behold, I am about to take the stick of Joseph (that is in the hand of Ephraim) and the tribes of Israel associated with him. And I will join with it the stick of Judah, and make them one stick, that they may be one in my hand. <sup>20</sup>When the sticks on which you write are in your hand before their eyes, <sup>21</sup>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. <sup>22</sup>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. <sup>23</sup>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.

<sup>24</sup>"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. <sup>25</sup>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. <sup>26</sup>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. <sup>27</sup>My dwelling place shall be with them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. <sup>28</sup>Then the nations will know that I am the Lord who sanctifies Israel, when my sanctuary is in their midst forevermore.”

### Ezekiel 37:1-14

## A New Building, An Ancient Vision

After 15 years, we begin our first week in a new building. It's a bit smaller, but with a better view. Who knows what it will bring? New seating arrangements. New sound challenges. A completely different atmosphere. Some of the older people, like those who saw the foundation of the Second Temple built, might still weep, while others who don't know much about the old might shout aloud for joy at a new beginning ([Ezra 3:12](#)). To both, it's the death of one life, the resurrection to another, metaphorically speaking, of course. It therefore feels deeply appropriate that in God's timing, we are looking in more detail at [Ezekiel's dry bones](#) of Ch. 37.

# The Desolate Valley of Very Dry Bones

To remind you, the famous passage has the hand of the LORD upon the prophet who brings him out “in the Spirit of the LORD” and set him down in the middle of the valley (Ezek 37:1). The prophet is brought to “*the*” valley, not “a” valley, making us wonder *which valley* he was set down in. The first hint as to the location is that it says, “it was full of bones.” Why would there be bones in a valley? Was this a valley of some great war? Or is it more figurative, like the valley of the shadow of death? Or could it be both?

As the prophet is led around, behold, there were very many [bones] on the surface of the valley, and they were very dry (37:2). That is, they had been here for a very long time. Bones on the surface littering a valley does kind of sound like a war, doesn't it, where the bodies were not really buried well if at all. Maybe we can identify this valley.

Amazingly (if you recall from our reading of chs. 34-39), *in both* the order in which ch. 37 comes to us in our Bibles as well as its minority placement in some ancient LXX and VUL manuscripts—after Ch. 39,<sup>1</sup> there is a valley in the immediate context. Both involve wars. In Ch. 39, it is

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<sup>1</sup> Johan Lust, “Ezekiel 36-40 in the Oldest Greek Manuscript,” *CBQ* 43.4 (Oct 1981): 517-33; Daniel Isaac Block, *The Book of Ezekiel, Chapters 25-48*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997-), 337-43.

something called the “Valley of the Travelers” and in it Gog and all his multitude are buried so it will be called the Valley of Hamon-gog (Ezek 39:11). For seven months the house of Israel will be burying them in order to cleanse the land (12-13). But it is such an overwhelming process that surely many bones lay scattered everywhere. In Ch. 35, the valleys of Edom are filled with those slain with the sword (35:8). And in 36, God prophesies against the valleys of Israel with nearly the same language used of Edom (36:4). In both cases, you have at the very least Gentile dead who are filling the valley, a fact very few literalists have bothered to point out, even though that’s the most literal reading of the valley in its context that you can find. In the canonical order, the valley must also include Jewish dead. Both, therefore, seem to refer to a kind of symbolic or even eschatological valley that is reserved for some kind of unexpected marvel.

What is that marvel? It is why I find God’s timing in having us be at precisely here in Ezekiel 37 for the first week in a new building to be so fascinating. *Resurrection*. It first comes to the prophet in the form of a question. “Son of man, can these bones live?” (37:3). The question hints at a resurrection—there’s no other way to describe bones coming to life in a question like that.

# The Astonishing Question and the Hope of Resurrection

Resurrection may be **the most practically important and precious doctrine** in all of Christianity. It is practically important for at least **two reasons**. First, the resurrection **proves that Jesus is precisely who he said he is**—God in human flesh. For Jesus' resurrection is not that of the widow Zarephath's son, or of Lazarus or of Tabitha. As incredible as those were, these were still *raised by other people* such as Elijah, Jesus, or Peter. No. *Jesus raised himself from the dead*, as he told the Pharisees that he would do, **“Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up” (John 2:19)**. But who has such power as to raise himself from the dead? Unlike the Buddha, Muhammad, or Krishna, Jesus Christ is presently alive in a resurrected body brought to eternal glorified physical life by the power of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. He is not dead. Have you come to grips with that singular truth of world history and so bowed your knee to the king of Life itself?

Second, **resurrection is the great hope of Christians**. This **hope is two-fold**. First, there is the **first resurrection**—being brought from death to life *spiritually*. Ephesians says,

“*You were dead* in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked ... But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when *we were dead* in our trespasses, *made us alive* together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (Eph 2:1-6). This is what Revelation 20:4-6 refers to as the dead coming to life and reigning with Christ for 1,000 years. It is the present inescapable wondrous reality of all who have true saving faith in Jesus Christ. Thus, it is a present hope to all who believe. They know it is true, for they know themselves to have been raised from the dead.

However, our hope is *not merely* in this life. For as Paul says, “If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied” (1Cor 15:19). This is why we groan inwardly as we eagerly await our adoption as sons, the redemption of *our bodies* (Rom 8:23). This refers to the second resurrection on the great judgement day, when we will receive our resurrected glorified bodies (1Cor 15:13-14, 20-22, 58), bodies that are just like the body Jesus received at his resurrection, for his is the firstfruits and we in Christ are the harvest.

# Eliot's Wasteland and the Newness of the New Covenant

Last week as we left our previous building, I told you that [the new covenant](#) is the central doctrine that God gives to answer the pains of loss in this life. The same goes, as we will see, for the dry bones. But this is something many desperately long to see, but can't. [T. S. Eliot](#) in his poem "The Waste Land" (1922) struggles mightily with the story as he openly laments his own spiritual depression as he describes a world where people feel cut off from spiritual meaning.

*My nerves are bad tonight. Yes, bad. Stay with me.  
Speak to me. Why do you never speak. Speak.  
What are you thinking of? What thinking? What?  
I never knew what you are thinking. Think.  
I think we are in rat's alley  
Where the dead men lost their bones.  
What is that noise?  
The wind under the door.  
What is that noise now? What is the wind doing?  
Nothing again nothing.<sup>2</sup>*

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<sup>2</sup> [T. S. Eliot](#), "[The Waste Land](#)," *Collected Poems: 1909-1962* (Faber and Faber, Ltd., 1922, 2020).

Eliot, like many, gets hung up on the bones themselves. But the key is the “*newness*.” The new covenant is “*not like*” anything that came before it in terms of its essential power that comes from the Holy Spirit’s indwelling presence. Ezekiel’s dry bones comes right in the middle of the new covenant prophecy, right between **Ezek 36:21-38** and **37:15-28**. You can think of this like an **Oreo®** cookie. The new covenant with its cleansing, new heart, new spirit, and God dwelling with his people is the yummy chocolate cookies, while the dry bones story is the white creamy filling, rather than Eliot’s poisonous hemlock of Socrates (though I will say, Eliot does have a hint of restoration as a faint possibility)! God takes what is dead, hopeless, and cut off, and by his Spirit he brings it back to life. This is why he led Ezekiel into the valley by his spirit. This is the hope of the New Covenant — resurrection life!

## Dry Bones in the Story of Creation, Death, and New Creation

To think properly about the dry bones, it is really quite important to put it into the larger biblical-theological context of **creation, death, and new creation**. This will help you

see that resurrection is *not just a future event* – it is the heart-beat of God’s redemptive plan from the beginning, including how we are to think properly about the dry bones prophecy and its fulfillment here and now.

In that light, I want you to recall **Genesis 1:2** how the *ruach* of God was hovering over the formless void. **Ruach** is the word we translate as **wind** or **breath** or **spirit**. Of course, this initial hovering like a bird over the waters is what precipitates creation as the chapter unfolds. It is always God’s Ruach that initiates creation, even as it is his Word, his Memra or Logos that speaks it into existence.

In **Gen 2:7**, the LORD God forms man from the dust and *breathes* into him the breath of life and man becomes a living being. He then *puts* (**2:8**) the man into **the Garden of Eden**, the place of life, presence of God, fruitfulness, and harmony in the midst of a world of chaos. Adam’s job will be to **extend the Garden to the four corners** of the earth. The point is that life has always been caused by God’s Ruach. God’s Breath or Spirit enters what is formless and dead and gives it life. Adam in Eden was the greatest archetype of this in all creation.

Of course, **things went awry quickly**. Sin brought about death, a curse, and exile from Eden. Everything in the Bible

from Genesis 3 on down to Ezekiel's day is nothing but story after story bearing this out for all to see. By Ezekiel's day, **Israel** is spiritually and nationally dead. They have become scattered and hopeless in exile. In **37:11** God reminds Ezekiel that the "**whole house of Israel**" is saying, "**Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are indeed cut off.**" And yet, of course, it is *not merely* Israel. Israel is simply the last to go, for long before Israel was even a nation, the **nations of the world** had been given over the darkness and deadness of their sin. And that's why we find those valleys of Edom filled with the dead carcasses of those slain with the sword. Edom simply represents all the other nations. Israel's condition is now the same. Perhaps that's what Eliot couldn't get out of his own mind?

It is into this creation-death-curse that God asks the prophet that astounding question. "**Can these bones live?**" The prophet, in what I think is **one of the funnier lines** in the whole Bible says, "**O Sovereign LORD, you know**" (**Ezek 37:3**). Wise answer, prophet! He's just been through several years of doom and gloom and all the sudden God wants to know if thousands or millions of bleached bones long since perished in some God-forsaken valley can live? Is this a trick question, God?

So the LORD tells him to, “Prophesy over these bones.” You’re a prophet, Ezekiel. Act like one and prophesy. Speak to them. Say, “O dry bones, hear the Word of the LORD” (37:4). You want me to do what? Am I on Candid Camera? Good thing he’s alone out here with just God or this could look really silly really quickly.

But Ezekiel knows the Word personally. He’s met him many times these past dozen years. Each time he has given him a powerful word and Ezekiel has obeyed without hesitation. This is a man of great faith! His message? “Behold, I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live” (5). Think of the foolishness of this. A valley full of bones and some guy is telling them that breath will enter them and they will live? How can they even hear? They are bones!

The picture given next is the reversal of the death process. “I will lay sinews upon you.” It’s rather disgusting. These are the tough, fibrous cords of tissue that connect your muscles to your bones. They are your tendons. Bones do not have those, they are long since dissolved away, returned to the dust from which they came.

Thankfully, they won’t just walk around like that all day, or this would be a prophecy made for Halloween. “I

will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live” (6b).

## Whose Bones and What Kind of Resurrection?

Live? From that, a question arises. **What kind of a resurrection is this teaching?** It is some kind of *national resurrection*? Most think so, since **vs. 11** says that those who say, “**Our bones are dried up**” is “**the whole house of Israel.**” The idea would be that God would restore the fortunes of the nations—and that’s it. It is purely metaphorical and corporate.

It is into this that we likely find the reason for Ch. 37 making it to a position after Chs. 38-39 in some early manuscripts. By moving it after the Battle with Gog and Magog, it reads as *eschatological* resurrection. In other words, this is somehow a prediction of the great resurrection at the end of days.

But **perhaps you’ve heard teachers of pastors say** that no one back in Ezekiel’s day had such a belief. Individual resurrection ideas don’t come around until the NT. The best

they had was that more metaphorical idea of a nation returning to its land or something. Heiser in his discussion of this spends a good deal of time rather bewildered at this scholarly consensus. But then again, welcome to the ivory towers of modern academia where that which is obvious to everyone else is often bewildering to those with great brains—due in no small part to overthinking it.

Their main argument is that a fully developed doctrine of individual bodily resurrection does not clearly appear until late in the OT period (at best) in something like **Dan 12:2**, “**And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.**” But even here, many aren’t even willing to grant this as a verse of personal resurrection!<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Talking about the OT and NT “book of life,” Heiser quotes Philip Johnson, “Intertestamental and New Testament writers understood the ‘Book of Life’ as referring to post-mortem fate. *This interpretation has often been read back into the Old Testament.* This approach takes the few Old Testament references as glimpses of a future hope. However, this need not be the meaning in their initial context. The record for life (Isa 4:3) applies to the current life on earth, not a later one. The divine comment on those in Malachi’s heavenly book, ‘On the day when I act, I will spare them’ (Mal 3:17) suggests preservation during judgment rather than life after death. Even the Book of Names in Daniel’s final vision (Dan 12:1), though mentioned just before resurrection, concerns ‘your people who shall be delivered,’ that is those who will survive the unprecedented anguish and presumably remain alive on earth. [MH: So Johnston doesn't even have Daniel 12:1-2 in there with the afterlife idea.] Similarly, the books mentioned in several Psalms need imply no more than Yahweh’s careful concern and provision for his people.” And Johnston is an Evangelical, how much more the liberals! Phillip. S. Johnston, “AfterLife,” in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Prophets*, ed. Mark J. Boda and Gordon J. McConville (Downers Grove, IL; Nottingham, England: IVP Academic; Inter-Varsity Press, 2012), 1. See Michael S. Heiser, “[Naked Bible Podcast Transcript Episode 151: Ezekiel 37](#),” *Naked Bible Podcast* (Mar 26, 2017),

Heiser thinks they've overstated their case. He debunks this through the meaning of the NT's and OT's "*book of life*." This is the book in heaven that has names written on it concerning the future resurrection of the dead—since it is a *book of life*. And while that is a fruitful way to approach this on its own, and there are several OT passages that talk about this book,<sup>4</sup> I think it is even more clear than that. I want to give you a few of the places that the Jews were commenting on Ezekiel 37 during and before Jesus' day and then ask a question.

As far as I can tell, we have about **seven references in extra-biblical books** that allude to or quote Ezekiel's dry bones. Of these, it is likely that only two (3 Enoch 23:7 and the Lives of the Prophets 3:12) remotely align with this academic view. However, the remaining five all clearly describe a **general individual resurrection from the dead at the end of time**. Some of those (like 4Macc 18:18 and 4Q385-86) seem to see only Jews being resurrected. However, it should be

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14. Heiser's discussion is itself a bit bewildering, as he took 10 minutes to say what could have been said in 1 minute. Also, I don't necessarily agree with the potential takes on Job and Daniel.

<sup>4</sup> See Heiser's discussion above as well as his earlier podcast [Michael S. Heiser, "Naked Bible Podcast Transcript Episode 89: The Book of Life," Naked Bible Podcast](#) (Feb 28, 2015). Heiser's discussion here might frustrate some on its wishy-washy take on predestination, but it's still a very good survey of the biblical data.

noted that even they knew of Gentiles who became Jews which would be included in this resurrection to life. The remaining three (likely a Christian redaction of Odes of Solomon 22:8-9; SibOr 2.224; and 4:181) all have some kind of **individual resurrection that include Jews and Gentiles**. The Sibylline Oracle is a good example,

Then the heavenly one will give souls and breath and voice to the dead and bones fastened with all kinds of joinings ... flesh and sinews and veins and skin about the flesh, and the former hairs. Bodies of humans, made solid in heavenly manner, breathing and set in motion, will be raised on a single day.

(SibOr 2.224-25)

Now remember, these are all *commenting* on Ezekiel 37, so that means this is what *they* believed *Ezekiel* was predicting. But now the question. As Heiser rightly asks, where did *they* get this idea? If it's nowhere to be found in the OT, why did they suddenly all start thinking like this? That's **the question academics don't want to answer**. Why? Because, obviously, the OT *does* in fact talk about individual resurrection and it does so on many occasions.

# Old Testament Hope for the Resurrection

Here are some of the most obvious:

- “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” (Ex 3:6)
- “You will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one see corruption.” (Psalm 16:9-11)
- “But God will ransom my soul from the power of Sheol, for he will receive me.” (Psalm 49:15)
- “Your dead shall live; their bodies shall rise. You who dwell in the dust, awake and sing for joy!” (Isa 26:19)
- “Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.” (Daniel 12:2-3)
- “For I know that my Redeemer lives... And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God.” (Job 19:25-27)

Job is likely the oldest book in the Bible. The man was himself not even an Israelite—they likely didn’t even exist yet. Uz is often located in Edom, so he was likely some kind of proto-Edomite king. So it is deeply meaningful that a man like this talks about seeing his Redeemer in the flesh

after his skin has been destroyed. He knew full well about the resurrection of the dead.

How much more than those like **Moses** who understood that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are alive (“**I am the God of**”... see **Matt 22:31-32**). How much more **David** who spoke about Christ’s (and therefore also his own) **body not seeing corruption** in Sheol, see **Acts 2:25-31**). How much more **Isaiah** who speaking of the great resurrection of all peoples tells us about their bodies rising after death? The academics’ point is greatly overstated. They think that because the OT doesn’t talk *a lot* about it, that this means they don’t talk *at all* about it. As Heiser says, they confuse frequency with novelty. Of course the OT talks about it and that’s where the NT gets it from too.

Old Testament Passages on Resurrection				
Category	Passage	Key Text / Summary	Type of Resurrection	Notes
Explicit / Clear	<b>Daniel 12:2-3</b>	“Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.”	Bodily, General	Clearest OT text on individual bodily resurrection and final judgment.
Explicit / Clear	<b>Isaiah 26:19</b>	“Your dead shall live; their bodies shall rise. You who dwell in the dust, awake and sing for joy!”	Bodily, National/Eschatological	Strong resurrection language in context of God’s final victory.
Strong Hope	<b>Job 19:25-27</b>	“For I know that my Redeemer lives... And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God.”	Bodily (personal)	One of the strongest expressions of personal resurrection hope in the OT.

## Old Testament Passages on Resurrection

Category	Passage	Key Text / Summary	Type of Resurrection	Notes
Strong Hope	Psalm 16:9-11	"You will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one see corruption."	Bodily (Messianic)	Quoted by Peter in Acts 2 as fulfilled in Jesus' resurrection.
Strong Hope	Psalm 49:15	"But God will ransom my soul from the power of Sheol, for he will receive me."	Deliverance from death	Clear hope beyond the grave.
Strong Hope	Psalm 73:24	"You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will receive me to glory."	Receiving to glory	Implies life after death with God.
Typological / Vision	Ezekiel 37:1-14	The valley of dry bones revived into a great army.	National + Spiritual	Most famous resurrection vision; often seen as type of spiritual + physical resurrection.
Typological	Hosea 6:1-3	"After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will raise us up..."	National / Typological	Often linked to Christ's third-day resurrection.
Actual Miracles	1 Kings 17:17-24	Elijah raises widow's son	Temp. bodily	First recorded resurrection.
Actual Miracles	2 Kings 4:18-37	Elisha raises Shunammite's son	Temporary bodily	Detailed and moving account.
Actual Miracles	2 Kings 13:20-21	Dead man revived when touching Elisha's bones	Temporary bodily	Unusual miracle showing prophetic power.

## The New Testament's Use of Ezekiel's Dry Bones

The NT obviously talks about resurrection too many times to count. But it also [alludes to and echoes Ezekiel 36-37 on numerous occasions](#). We saw last week that there are numerous places that the NT refers especially to Ezekiel 36's new covenant ([John 3:5-8](#) with [Ezek 36:25-27](#); [Rom 8:1-4](#) with [36:26-27](#); [Rom 9:25-26](#) with [36:28](#); [37:23, 27](#); [2Cor 3:3](#) with [36:26](#); [Heb 8:8-12](#) with [36:25-27](#); [Acts 2](#)

with [36:27](#); etc.). And we also saw how it likewise alludes to parts of the two-sticks parable (esp. [Rom 11:11-24](#) with [37:15-28](#)).

Perhaps the most overlooked of the citations here is when Matthew says that the Messiah will be called “[Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins](#)” ([Matt 1:21](#)). This appears to come from the OT. But where? Scholars often cite [Psalm 129:8 LXX](#), “[And he will redeem Israel from all his lawlessness/iniquities.](#)” But as Piotrowski points out, there are only two verses in the entire Old Testament where salvation is from an internal moral enemy; namely sin.<sup>5</sup> These are [Ezekiel 36:29](#) and [37:23](#), “[I will save you from all your defilements ... I will save them from all their sins.](#)” Who in these verses is saving them? Yahweh. If Matthew is alluding to this verse, it means in calling him Jesus, that the Gospel is teaching us that [Jesus is Yahweh!](#)

It gets even better. The next verse is that well-known verse that, “[All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: ‘Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel’](#)”

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<sup>5</sup> [Nicholas G. Piotrowski](#), “[I Will Save My People From Their Sins: The Influence of Ezekiel 36:28a; 37:23b on Matthew 1:21](#),” *Tyndale Bulletin* 64.1 (2013): 33. [Michael S. Heiser](#), “[Ezekiel 37: Episode 151](#),” *Naked Bible Podcast Transcript* (Mar 26, 2017), 22. Heiser notes the following article,

(which means, God with us)” (Matt 1:22). Usually (and rightly so), we are taken to Isaiah 7:14 and the prophecy that basically just says this. But think about the logic. Vs. 21 says call him Jesus. Vs. 22 says this is fulfilled in calling him Immanuel, which means God with us. Calling him Jesus; calling him Immanuel. These are conceptually the same. But friend, what is the very last prophecy about in Ezek 37? God will set his sanctuary in their midst forever. His dwelling place shall be with them. He will be their God. They shall be his people. The nations will know that he is the Lord, when his sanctuary is in their midst forevermore.” This is conceptually identical to God With Us! In other words, both the Jesus and the Immanuel name-prophecies are found in the very same passage in Ezekiel 37!

Knowing therefore that the NT continually cites what comes just before the dry bones and what comes just after the dry bones as being fulfilled *already in our days*, we should think about the dry bones themselves and how they come up in our own Scripture.

It very much seems to be that in John 20:22, when Jesus breaths on his disciples and tells them, “Receive the Holy Spirit,” that this is a strong allusion to our dry bones pas-

sage. The NT is constantly doing this, because it is our inspired commentary on the OT! Remember, God told Ezekiel that he would “put breath in you” (Ezek 37:6). In the Ezekiel passage, when the prophet does prophecy to the bones, at first it says there came a sound and a rattling and bones came together, bone to bone (7). Then there were sinews. Then flesh. Then skin.

## “Hear the Word of the Lord!” — Preaching to Dry Bones

This is where that strange children’s song, “Dem bones, dem bones, dem dry bones” that came from an earlier negro spiritual originates ... I guess.

*Hear the word of the Lord.  
Toe bone connected to the foot bone  
Foot bone connected to the heel bone  
Heel bone connected to the ankle bone  
Ankle bone connected to the leg bone  
Leg bone connected to the knee bone  
Knee bone connected to the thigh bone  
Thigh bone connected to the hip bone  
Hip bone connected to the back bone  
Back bone connected to the shoulder bone*

*Shoulder bone connected to the neck bone  
Neck bone connected to the head bone  
Hear the word of the Lord.<sup>6</sup>*

What's the point of teaching kids such a song (the spiritual I linked below is better!)? To give them an anatomy lesson? No. It is to **reinforce to them that God's word is so mighty and powerful** that dry bones can hear God's word and one by one align into the right place to be raised from the dead. It teaches resurrection.

I want to make a theological point here that I think is quite important for you all to understand. It is about the instrumental means of how the bones come to life. "**Speak**" to the bones, God says. **Prophecy** to them. Listen to Michael Horton, "**So the Spirit commands Ezekiel to preach to the dry bones. But notice the kind of preaching occurring here. No one needs to be slain: death is already taken for granted. It is "Gospel" that is now required.**" The Gospel is what brings us to life. The message of the Gospel and only that message. These bones are "dead." They need life, not help. Horton continues, "**But notice what Ezekiel is told to say to**

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<sup>6</sup> **James Weldon Johnson** and J. Rosamond Johnson, "Dem Bones," first recorded by [The Famous Myers Jubilees Singers](#), 1928.

the bones-or rather, what he is not told to say. He is not told to exhort the bones, to encourage them, to manage them, or to identify himself with them in sympathetic feeling. He is not told to share his personal testimony or to hire a praise band. He is told, 'Prophecy to these bones, and say to them, 'O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD!'' (v. 4)."<sup>7</sup>

So many in the church today have absolutely no idea about this. The reason? **They don't believe that apart from Christ, people are dead men.** Dry bones. No. They think they are still alive. Hurting, sure. Sick? Maybe drowning. But all they really need is a life jacket to help themselves. That is not the Biblical understanding. And that's why so many don't think this passage has any present fulfilled reality. Frankly, even we Christians still need the Gospel, not to bring us to life again, but to cause us to revive after we have sinned, for our sin is a kind of wallowing in our death. Only the Gospel is **the power to save and to sanctify** (i.e. salvation; **Rom 1:16**). The Gospel that Jesus is Lord, that he died for your sins, and that by faith alone through grace alone God is pleased to resurrect dry spiritual bones.

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<sup>7</sup> Michael Horton, "[Do You Hear the Spirit?](#)" *Modern Reformation: Come Holy Spirit* (July/Aug 1998).

# The Second Command: Prophecy to the Breath and the Mystery of the Eighth

Returning to Ezekiel though, it is vital to see that after this first round of preaching, **there still was no breath in them (8)**. Something more was needed.

In the weave of Ezek 35-37—and perhaps this is just a total fluke, I don't know, **vs. 9** begins the place where *the life comes*. Curiously, it is also **the eighth** panel or square of a 3x3 woven text. In this square and this square alone, we find resurrection. Why is that curious?

There is one more thing I would like to teach you this morning about resurrection and this is its association with **the number 8**. In his book *Number in Scripture*, E. W. Bullinger rightly says,

In Hebrew the number eight is (*Sh'moneh*), from the root (*Shah'meyn*), “to make fat,” “cover with fat,” “to super-abound.” As a participle it means “one who abounds in strength,” etc. As a noun it is “superabundant fertility,” “oil,” etc. So that as a numeral it is the superabundant number. As *seven* was so called because the seventh day was the day of completion and rest, so *eight*, as the eighth day, was over and above this perfect completion, and was indeed the

*first* of a new series, as well as being the *eighth*. Thus it already represents two numbers in one, the *first* and *eighth*.”<sup>8</sup>

What is “eight?” Biblically, it is  $7 + 1$ . What is seven? This is the days of creation. Assume **creation** began on a Sunday and God rested on Saturday. What is the eighth? It is *Sunday* again. So, it starts over. Curiously, this pattern is also **found in music**. Do, Re, Me, Fa, So, La, Ti ... Do. The second Do is not a brand new note. It is the original note, an octave higher. Like Sunday. The week and the octave thus match up.

Do	Re	Me	Fa	So	La	Ti
Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday

Why would I bring this up? There are several psalms that the LXX says are “**Hymns for the eighth**” (Ps 6, 12, etc.). In the Early Church “**The Eighth**” was interpreted as referring to **the resurrection** on the eighth day, and thus these Psalms are almost always interpreted Messianically. Why? Because Jesus rose from the dead on the “eighth,” Palm Sunday to Easter Sunday. This is why Christians started worshiping on the first day of the week. We meet on

<sup>8</sup> **Ethelbert W. Bullinger**, Number in Scripture, “Eight” (London, 1894), 196.

Sunday to celebrate the resurrection! This, itself, was codified into the Jewish feasts in special “sabbath” days that took place on the **first, eighth, fifteenth, or fiftieths**—always on Sundays (**Gen 17:12; Lev 9:1; 12:3; 23:6-8; 9-14, 15-21; 34-35, 36, 39; 25:8-13; Deut 16:9-12**). Circumcision, Passover, Pentecost, Unleavened Bread, Tabernacles, Firstfruits ... they are all special eighth day events and all point to the resurrection of Jesus. That’s why I find the eighth panel of this weave as resurrection so curious. Was it deliberate? I don’t know. But it will preach!

Let’s return to Ezekiel. Because the bodies had been put together but had no life, God tells the prophet a second time, “Prophecy to the *breath*; prophecy, son of man, and say to the *breath*, Thus says the Sovereign GOD: Come from the four *winds*, O *breath*, and breathe on these slain, that they may live” (**Ezek 37:9**). Do you see what’s happening here? *Ruach* appears four times in this one verse. Once it is translated as “winds.” The four winds, reminding us of those four corners of the earth. In other words, this is an international wind!

Thrice it is translated as “breath,” though some translations say “spirit.” What’s going on? In Eliot’s poem, the wind is doing nothing. He is spiritually sapped. But the

word of the prophet (the word from God) is commanding the breath of God to enter the bones. **Word and Breath**. It's the act of speaking. It is also the very words used for the Second and Third Persons of the Trinity. Without breath, the word is dead. Without the word, the breath is aimless—like a wind tossed about to and fro.

Essentially then, without the breath giving life—without the Spirit giving life—there is no resurrection. Bones that become sinew, flesh, and skin—maybe. Fake Christians. Walking corpses. Zombies. But not the breath of life. This is why when **Jesus breathes on his disciples**, it is a direct echo of the dry bones. This is why when the Spirit is poured out on the Jews gathered in Jerusalem at **Pentecost**, the Spirit falls upon them and they prophesy. It is an echo of the dry bones. The same is true of all the major Spirit descending upon people in Acts, which after this increasingly goes out to the Gentiles.

You see, the NT is appropriating the dry bones story just like it does the new covenant it is sandwiched between. It is fulfilled in the church. The perfect picture of this, although it is slightly earlier, is when Jesus dear friend **Lazarus**—whom I believe is the disciple whom he loved, because he's the only one John's gospel ever identifies that way (**John**

11:5, 36)—when he dies, what does Jesus do? He *preaches* to him. It's the simplest sermon ever. But impossible to hear if you are dead. “Lazarus” (he calls him by name), “come out” (43). It's a picture of the bones.

But Lazarus came out! He heard the sermon! He heard the Word! Spurgeon, in his sermon on Lazarus says, “Now is fulfilled the word of the Lord by Ezekiel,— ‘And ye shall know that I am the Lord, when I have opened your graves, O my people, and brought you up out of your graves.’” We bless our God that he does thus quicken the dry bones, whose hope was lost. However far gone a man may be, he cannot be beyond the reach of the Lord's right arm of mighty mercy. The Lord can change the vilest of the vile into the most holy of the holy!”<sup>9</sup>

This is our great hope, then, is it not? Are the dry bones about a future bodily resurrection? I would not put that past God at all to have a kind of already, not-yet fulfillment of this prophecy. Many have thought so. And certainly, biblically, one cannot separate the first and second resurrections by anything but time, for we are body-soul people. The soul may be resurrected first; the body will follow. But we are

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<sup>9</sup> Charles Spurgeon, “[Unbinding Lazarus: John 11:43-44](#),” The Spurgeon Library (April 18, 1884).

one, which is precisely why we who have been raised from the dead spiritually long for the redemption of our bodies.

But while this is our glorious hope *in the future*, you must not lose sight of the present reality. Just as the new covenant is present today, so also is the dry bones fulfilled ... *today*. Every time a dead person is brought to life by the power of the Gospel, this story is fulfilled. One more body in the valley of the shadow of death, one more clump of bones in the valleys of Edom and Israel is brought to life. A miracle.

## An Exceedingly Great Army

And what do they become? After the prophet obeyed a second time and prophesy to the bodies with skin on them, behold, “They lived and stood on their feet, an exceedingly great army” (10). What is this army? Again, we teach our children, “I may never march in the infantry, Ride in the cavalry, Shoot the artillery. I may never fly o'er the enemy, But I'm in the Lord's army!” Revelation 19:14 is likely a reflection on this verse, for in it, our Great Commander, Jesus—the Word of God, rides to earth on his white stallion, his sword in hand, and the armies of heaven—that is the saints in glory, and perhaps also here on earth still, follow in

his train. We are the army of the Kingdom of God, citizens of Heaven itself.

Today, on this first day in a new building, the first time you've sat in that pew, the first time you've heard a word from this pulpit, you have heard about the resurrection of the dead. God's timing is amazing. You have seen that this is **fulfilled, already**, in Christ's NT church. You have seen that you badly needed not help, but new life itself and that this could only come by the power of God's Spirit.

Today, you hear from God's word, "**Come to life. Spirit of God, revive our dry bones and put life in what is otherwise dead.**" Do you feel the winds blowing? Not the winds of change. The wind of the Holy Spirit through the power of his word to resurrect the dead. Can you hear the Spirit rustling in the word? Do you see his power to save and to sanctify? Believe it. It is real. And **you are God's army to prove it.**

Go forth from this place as soldiers in his army, and take back souls in boldness by proclaiming to them the same message that brought you to life. God will hear. God is faithful. He sees the bones. And he commissions you, his people, to be part of how he brings many more to life before the return of our Savior who will then give the fullness of resurrection

to our mortal dying bodies. What glories. What promises. What a story! A story of dry bones turned into an army to serve the Living God.

Source	Passage	Ezekiel Reference(s)	Type	Key Connection / Notes	Interpretation Category
Matthew	1:21	36:28b-29a; 37:23b	Strong Allusion	“He will save his people from their sins” — internal moral deliverance.	Church / Ongoing Fulfillment (Jews + Gentiles)
Matthew	1:22	Ezek 37:26-28	Echo	I Will set my sanctuary in their midst forevermore... My dwelling place shall be with them... I will be their God, and they shall people my people.	Church / Ongoing Fulfillment (Jews + Gentiles)
John	3:5–8	36:25–27	Strong Allusion	Born of water and Spirit; new heart / cleansing.	Church / Ongoing Fulfillment (Jews + Gentiles)
John	20:22	37:5–10, 14	Echo	Jesus breathes on disciples: “Receive the Holy Spirit.”	Church / Ongoing Fulfillment (Jews + Gentiles)
Romans	8:1–4	36:26–27	Echo	New heart/spirit enabling obedience.	Church / Ongoing Fulfillment (Jews + Gentiles)
Romans	9:25-26	36:28; 37:23, 27	Thematic Echo	“I will call them ‘my people’ who were not my people ... I will be their God.	Church / Ongoing Fulfillment (Jews + Gentiles)
Romans	11:11–24	37:15–28 (two sticks)	Thematic Echo	Grafting Gentiles into one olive tree w/ restored Israel; one people of God.	Church / Ongoing Fulfillment (Jews + Gentiles)
2 Corinthians	3:3	36:26	Allusion	Heart of flesh instead of stone.	Church / Ongoing Fulfillment (Jews + Gentiles)
2 Corinthians	6:16	37:26–27	Quote / Allusion	God dwelling among His people; applied to the Church.	Church / Ongoing Fulfillment (Jews + Gentiles)
Hebrews	8:8–12	36:25–28; 37:23–28	Thematic Parallel	New covenant language.	Church / Ongoing Fulfillment (Jews + Gentiles)
John	10:16; 11:52	37:15–28 (two sticks)	Echo	One flock, one shepherd; gathering into one.	Church / Ongoing Fulfillment (Jews + Gentiles)

Source	Passage	Ezekiel Reference(s)	Type	Key Connection / Notes	Interpretation Category
Acts	ch. 2 (Pentecost)	36:27; 37:1–14	Thematic Fulfillment	Spirit poured out on gathered Jews; initial revival of Israel.	Church / Ongoing Fulfillment (Jews + Gentiles)
Revelation	11:11	37:5, 10	Allusion	Breath of life enters the two witnesses.	Church / Ongoing Fulfillment (Jews + Gentiles)
Revelation	21:3, 7	37:26–27; 36:28	Echo	God’s dwelling with His people; “I will be their God.”	Church / Ongoing Fulfillment (Jews + Gentiles)
Dead Sea Scrolls	Pseudo-Ezekiel (4Q385 fr. 2–3; 4Q386 fr. 1)	37:1–14	Rewritten Expansion	Literal resurrection of the righteous of Israel as reward for piety.	Eschatological Resurrection (Jews only)
Odes of Solomon	22:8–9	37:1–14	Strong Allusion	Dry bones covered with flesh; Christ raises the dead.	Church / Ongoing Fulfillment (Jews + Gentiles)
Sibylline Oracles	2.221–251 (esp. 2.224)	37:1–14	Allusion	Resurrection of the dead in a general judgment scene.	General Resurrection (Jews + Gentiles)
Sibylline Oracles	4.181	37:1–14	Allusion	God raising the dead (bones/flesh imagery).	General Resurrection (Jews + Gentiles)
3 Enoch	23:7	37 (general)	Echo	Mystical resurrection / revival motifs.	Other (Mystical / Heavenly – Jews primarily)
Lives of the Prophets	3:12 (on Ezekiel)	37:1–14	Reference	Tradition linking Ezekiel to resurrection hope.	Eschatological Resurrection (Jews only)
4 Maccabees	18:18	37:1–3	Direct Allusion	“Will these dry bones live?” in context of martyrdom and resurrection hope.	Eschatological Resurrection (Jews only)

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