

# EZEKIEL

## Hard to Heart

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### *“Dem Bones”*

37:1-28

The latest thing in spicing-up sermons is to play movie clips that illustrate the point you're trying to make from God's Word. One of the services, Movie Ministry, has suggested clips for various topics. Let's say, for example, you want to illustrate spiritual warfare. They suggest a scene from *The Matrix:Reloaded*. Problem is, it's an R-rated film and they attach this warning:

*The Matrix: Reloaded* contain strong martial-arts, gun, and vehicular violence, profanity, and a scene of sensuality and partial nudity.

OK, **maybe I don't want to use that one!** It's tricky trying to illustrate the Bible. You don't want to stumble anybody while trying to encourage them.

Ezekiel was an extraordinary illustrator of Bible truth. He was a walking PowerPoint presentation. His visions and his acted-out dramas brought God's prophecies to life for the exiles in Babylon. We encounter two more of those in chapter thirty-seven.

Ezekiel had for many years been telling the exiles that they would not be returning to Jerusalem. The city, and the Temple, would be destroyed by King Nebuchadnezzar and they would serve-out the seventy-years of the Babylonian captivity.

In fact, something the Bible calls “the times of the Gentiles” had begun. Israel would not really be a sovereign nation again until the far distant future, in the last days. Yes, they would return to the land after the

Babylonian captivity. But there they would be subject to the Persians and, eventually, the Romans. Then in 70AD Jerusalem and the Temple would again be overrun and destroyed. From that time until very recently although there was a Jewish presence in the Promised Land, there was no nation of Israel - only Jews dispersed all over the earth in every nation.

Ezekiel was also telling them that the Jews of the dispersion would be miraculously regathered to their land. They would be restored as a nation.

Now, in chapter thirty-seven, he illustrates their future regathering and restoration using two figures: The vision of the dry bones in verse one through fourteen, and The sign of the two sticks in verses fifteen through twenty-eight.

I suggest these are simple, straightforward power-points to say nothing more, but nothing less, than Israel would live again as a nation in the last days.

We can be pretty confident in that interpretation because Israel DOES live again as a nation in these, the last days!

Let's take a look at dem bones.

Ezekiel 37:1 The hand of the Lord came upon me and brought me out in the Spirit of the Lord, and set me down in the midst of the valley; and it was full of bones.

God transported Ezekiel to a specific valley, although we're not told which. It was a bone field full of disconnected skeletons.

Ezekiel 37:2 Then He caused me to pass by them all around, and behold, there were very many in the open valley; and indeed they were very dry.

All indications were that these bones had been there a long time. A long time had passed or, we would say from our future perspective that a long time had passed.

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

Ezekiel had learned to not be too quick in interpreting God's signs. He'd rather the Lord tell him exactly what He intended. It's an encouragement to us to let God's Word interpret itself as we compare Scripture with Scripture.

It's also a reminder that Scripture isn't really subject to private interpretations. In other words, there really are things that are true and must be believed by all Christians. Sure, there are non-essentials where we may disagree agreeably. But there are also foundational truths, once for all delivered by the apostles and prophets, that are unshakeable.

Ezekiel 37:4 Again He said to me, "Prophesy to these bones, and say to them, 'O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord!

Ezekiel 37:5 Thus says the Lord God to these bones: "Surely I will cause breath to enter into you, and you shall live.

Ezekiel 37:6 I will put sinews on you and bring flesh upon you, cover you with skin and put breath in you; and you shall live. Then you shall know that I am the Lord." ' ' "

We read that so nonchalantly - as if it's normal to start prophesying to a bunch of skeletons! What if God asked me to preach to a building? Or to go out into an empty field and start preaching to no one?

We want to be careful here. Too many churches sponsor stunts to encourage attendance. That's not what Ezekiel was doing! It's not what we want to do. But if we get a clear word from the Lord to do something, we should follow-through with it even if it is slightly unusual.

In a moment God will give us the interpretation of this vision. For now we marvel that He wants His people to understand Him so much that He illustrates for us using visual aids.

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

Ezekiel 37:8 Indeed, as I looked, the sinews and the flesh came upon them, and the skin covered them over; but there was no breath in them.

Ezekiel 37:9 Also He said to me, "Prophesy to the breath, prophesy, son of man, and say to the breath, 'Thus says the Lord God: "Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain, that they may live." ' ' "

Ezekiel 37:10 So I prophesied as He commanded me, and breath came into them, and they lived, and stood upon their feet, an exceedingly great army.

We would say that the bones came to life in two stages:

1. First, they were brought back to physical life as bone came to bone and sinews and flesh came upon them and skin covered them.
2. Second, they were brought back to spiritual life as “the breath,” meaning the spirit, gave them life.

What does it mean? Well we already know if we’ve been listening to Ezekiel’s prophecies. It means Jews dispersed from all over the earth will in the last days be regathered to their Promised Land and be saved.

But to be sure we’re getting it right, God gives us the interpretation.

Ezekiel 37:11 Then He said to me, "Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They indeed say, 'Our bones are dry, our hope is lost, and we ourselves are cut off!'

It’s important we realize that God is not speaking of the resurrection of certain individuals. He’s talking about resurrecting Israel as a nation again after her long dispersal in all the nations of the earth.

The exiles in Babylon were about to hear the news that Jerusalem and the Temple were gone. Ezekiel was giving them hope of a certain future. They would be a nation again one day.

Ezekiel 37:12 Therefore prophesy and say to them, 'Thus says the Lord God: "Behold, O My people, I will open your graves and cause you to come up from your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel.

Ezekiel 37:13 Then you shall know that I am the Lord, when I have opened your graves, O My people, and brought you up from your graves.

I’m pretty sure Israel is a nation again! Jews from all corners of the world have regathered to their Promised Land and continue to do so in increasing numbers. We have seen the literal fulfillment of this prophecy.

Ezekiel 37:14 I will put My Spirit in you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I, the Lord, have spoken it and performed it," says the Lord.' "

We have yet to see this. This is part two of the vision. We've seen the physical resurrection to the land, but not the spiritual resurrection to the Lord. Jews are in the land but the nation is not saved.

If God has accomplished verses twelve and thirteen, it's more than reasonable to suppose He will accomplish verse fourteen.

We, of course, know how He's going to do it. It involves the seven-year Great Tribulation, the rise of the antichrist, and the Second Coming of Jesus Christ to the earth.

Twenty-five hundred years ago Ezekiel prophesied to a valley full of dry bones. Today they live just as he said they would and are awaiting the breath of the Lord to save them.

The sign of the two sticks is next.

Ezekiel 37:15 Again the word of the Lord came to me, saying,

Ezekiel 37:16 "As for you, son of man, take a stick for yourself and write on it: 'For Judah and for the children of Israel, his companions.' Then take another stick and write on it, 'For Joseph, the stick of Ephraim, and for all the house of Israel, his companions.' Ezekiel 37:17 Then join them one to another for yourself into one stick, and they will become one in your hand.

Ezekiel 37:18 "And when the children of your people speak to you, saying, 'Will you not show us what you mean by these?' -

Ezekiel 37:19 say to them, 'Thus says the Lord God: "Surely I will take the stick of Joseph, which is in the hand of Ephraim, and the tribes of Israel, his companions; and I will join them with it, with the stick of Judah, and make them one stick, and they will be one in My hand." '

Ezekiel 37:20 And the sticks on which you write will be in your hand before their eyes.

After King Solomon died the nation of Israel split in two, in 931BC. The Southern Kingdom was known as Judah because Judah was its larger tribe and because the country was ruled by a king from that tribe. The Northern Kingdom was called Israel, or sometimes Ephraim either because Ephraim

was the strongest and most influential tribe or because the first king of Israel, Jeroboam, was an Ephraimite.

Israel was taken into captivity by Assyria in 722BC, and Judah was taken into exile by Babylon in 605, 597, and 586BC.

The uniting of the sticks pictured God's restoring and reuniting His people in the land as a single nation.

Ezekiel 37:21 "Then say to them, 'Thus says the Lord God: "Surely I will take the children of Israel from among the nations, wherever they have gone, and will gather them from every side and bring them into their own land;

Ezekiel 37:22 and I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel; and one king shall be king over them all; they shall no longer be two nations, nor shall they ever be divided into two kingdoms again.

Ezekiel 37:23 They shall not defile themselves anymore with their idols, nor with their detestable things, nor with any of their transgressions; but I will deliver them from all their dwelling places in which they have sinned, and will cleanse them. Then they shall be My people, and I will be their God.

Israel was divided at the time of this prophesy. The Northern Kingdom, in fact, didn't exist. This is therefore clearly a future prophecy, and it is future even to us.

I should tell you that there is a lot of crazy speculation out there about the supposed "ten lost tribes" of the Northern Kingdom.

- British Israelism (also known as 'Anglo-Israelism') is the theory that people of Western European descent, especially Britain and the United States, are descended from the lost tribes of Israel. Adherents argue that the deported Israelites became Scythians / Cimmerians who are ancestors of the Celts/ Anglo Saxons of Western Europe. The theory arose in England, whence it spread to the United States. During the 20th Century, British Israelism was promoted by Herbert W. Armstrong, founder of the Worldwide Church of God. Armstrong argued that this theory provided a 'key' to understanding biblical prophecy, and that he was called to proclaim these prophecies to the 'lost tribes' of Israel before the coming of the 'end-times.'

- Several explorers, especially during the 17th and 18th centuries, claimed to have collected evidence that some of the American Indian tribes might be descended from the Ten Lost Tribes.

The truth is that the tribes were never lost. Most of the people of the Northern Kingdom were deported to ancient Assyria. Many of those who remained in the land re-united with Judah in the south. Assyria was then conquered by Babylon, who then went on to conquer and deport the two remaining tribes of the Southern Kingdom, Judah and Benjamin. When King Cyrus allowed the Israelites to return to Israel, many from the ten northern tribes and two southern tribes returned to Israel.

In the New Testament, the prophetess Anna was from the tribe of Asher (one of the 10 supposed lost tribes). In Jesus' day, Israel was a mix of those from the former Northern and Southern Kingdoms. In the end times, God will call out witnesses from each of the 12 tribes.

Ezekiel 37:24 "David My servant shall be king over them, and they shall all have one shepherd; they shall also walk in My judgments and observe My statutes, and do them.

There's debate among scholars as to whether "David" here means the former King David or the greater son of David, Jesus Christ. I lean towards King David reigning over Israel while Jesus Christ is the ultimate monarch over Israel and all the nations of the earth.

Ezekiel 37:25 Then they shall dwell in the land that I have given to Jacob My servant, where your fathers dwelt; and they shall dwell there, they, their children, and their children's children, forever; and My servant David shall be their prince forever.

Ezekiel 37:26 Moreover I will make a covenant of peace with them, and it shall be an everlasting covenant with them; I will establish them and multiply them, and I will set My sanctuary in their midst forevermore.

Ezekiel 37:27 My tabernacle also shall be with them; indeed I will be their God, and they shall be My people.

Ezekiel 37:28 The nations also will know that I, the Lord, sanctify Israel, when My sanctuary is in their midst forevermore." ' ' "

Note the permanence of these promises - "forevermore," "everlasting," and "forever." We're definitely looking forward to the Millennial Kingdom and beyond it to eternity.

Israel has been physically resurrected. They will be spiritually resurrected.

**To say we live in exciting times is an understatement!**

