

The Book of Ezekiel, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 17: The Valley of Dry Bones and One Nation Restored

Ezekiel 37:1-28

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

Show through the valley of dry bones that God alone raises the spiritually dead, doing by His word and Spirit what no human power can do, and that this gives sure hope to the discouraged.

Establish from the joining of the two sticks and the promise of one shepherd that the restoration foretold here is fulfilled in the church, the true and spiritual Israel gathered out of Jew and Gentile under Christ.

Guard the class against the dispensational and premillennial reading by tracing how the New Testament defines Israel, the kingdom, and the temple in spiritual terms centered on Christ reigning now over His people.

Question 1

Student Question:

The LORD asks Ezekiel, Can these bones live? and Ezekiel answers, O Lord GOD, you know (37:3). What does this exchange teach about where the power of restoration lies, and why is it important that the prophet does not presume on his own ability or despair of God's?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The hand of the LORD carries Ezekiel out by the Spirit and sets him in the middle of a valley full of bones (37:1). He is made to walk among them and see their condition.

The bones are very many and very dry (37:2). The detail underscores death at its most complete and hopeless, with no flicker of life remaining.

The LORD asks, Son of man, can these bones live? (37:3). The question presses Ezekiel to face the impossibility of the case by any human reckoning.

Ezekiel answers, O Lord GOD, you know. He neither presumes nor despairs, but commits the matter to the One for whom nothing is impossible.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The dryness of the bones pictures a people, and a heart, utterly dead and beyond all natural hope of revival.
- The question can these bones live drives us to confess that life belongs to God alone and cannot be manufactured by human effort.

- Ezekiel's reply, you know, is a model of humble faith, refusing both proud presumption and faithless despair.

Discussion Prompts

- Why does the LORD make Ezekiel walk among the bones and note how dry they are?
- What does the question can these bones live force the prophet to confront?
- How is Ezekiel's answer, O Lord GOD, you know, a pattern of faith for us?

Question 2

Student Question:

When have you looked at a situation in your own life or in someone you love and concluded that hope was lost, only to find that God could still bring life?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The LORD commands Ezekiel to prophesy to the bones, Hear the word of the LORD (37:4). Life will come as the word of God is spoken over the dead.

Behold, I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live (37:5). The promise is wholly God's act, yet it comes through the proclamation entrusted to the prophet.

God promises sinews, flesh, skin, and breath, and the refrain, you shall know that I am the LORD (37:6). The purpose of the resurrection is that God be known.

The pattern is striking, God works His mighty resurrection through the faithful speaking of His word, not apart from it.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God brings the dead to life by His word, which teaches us that He raises dead hearts today through the proclamation of the gospel.
- The prophet is given no power of his own. He simply speaks what God commands, and God supplies the life.
- The aim of the whole work is that they shall know that I am the LORD, so that resurrection serves the glory and knowledge of God.

Discussion Prompts

- Why must Ezekiel speak before the bones can live?
- How does this connect to the way God gives spiritual life through the preaching of the gospel?
- What does the refrain you shall know that I am the LORD reveal about God's purpose?

Question 3

Student Question:

The bones come together only when Ezekiel prophesies, that is, when he speaks the word of the LORD over them (37:4–8). What does this teach about how God brings spiritual life today, and how does it connect to the preaching of the gospel?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

As Ezekiel prophesies there is a noise, a rattling, and the bones come together, bone to its bone (37:7). The word takes immediate effect.

Sinews, flesh, and skin come upon them, so that whole bodies are formed where only scattered bones had lain (37:8).

Yet the text adds a sobering note, but there was no breath in them. The bodies are complete in form but still lifeless.

This deliberate pause between the forming of the body and the giving of breath sets up the lesson of the next verses.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The instant response of the bones to the word shows the power of God's word to accomplish exactly what it declares.
- The complete body without breath warns that outward form and order, even a perfect frame, are not yet life.
- The pause prepares us to see that true life requires the breath, the Spirit, that God alone supplies.

Discussion Prompts

- What does the immediate rattling and joining of the bones teach about God's word?
- Why does the text stress that there was no breath in the assembled bodies?
- How does this prepare us for the lesson about the breath in the verses that follow?

Question 4**Student Question:**

Where has the word of God spoken to you, whether read or preached, been the means by which God awakened or revived your own dead heart?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The LORD tells Ezekiel to prophesy to the breath, Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain, that they may live (37:9).

The same word means wind, breath, and Spirit, and the imagery recalls God breathing the breath of life into man at creation.

As Ezekiel prophesies, the breath comes into them, and they live and stand on their feet, an exceedingly great army (37:10).

What was a valley of death becomes a vast living host, raised and standing, by the breath of God alone.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The breath that gives life pictures the Spirit of God, without whom religious form remains as dead as bones.
- The echo of creation teaches that the same God who first gave life is the God who gives new life to the dead.
- The exceedingly great army shows the abundance of God's reviving grace, raising not a few but a multitude.

Discussion Prompts

- Why is the breath, which is also Spirit, the decisive element in the vision?
- How does this scene echo God breathing life into man at creation?
- What does the exceedingly great army teach about the scope of God's reviving power?

Question 5

Student Question:

The bones are joined and covered with flesh, yet there is no life in them until the breath enters (37:8–10). Why is this two-stage picture significant, and what does it teach about the difference between mere outward form and the inward life that only the Spirit of God can give?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

God interprets the vision, These bones are the whole house of Israel, who say, Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are clean cut off (37:11).

The exiles felt themselves as good as dead, scattered and without prospect, a nation extinguished by the judgment that had fallen.

Therefore prophesy, says the LORD, Behold, I will open your graves and raise you from your graves, O my people (37:12).

God meets their despair not with a rebuke but with a promise of resurrection, lifting them from the very grave of their hopelessness.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The plain interpretation given by God Himself keeps us from speculation and centers the vision on His reviving of His people.
- The words our hope is lost express the deepest spiritual despair, the conviction that God can do nothing more.
- God answers despair with the language of resurrection, showing that no condition is too far gone for His grace to reach.

Discussion Prompts

- How does God's own interpretation guard us against reading the vision wrongly?
- What does the cry our hope is lost reveal about the state of the people?
- Why is it significant that God answers their despair with the promise to open their graves?

Question 6

Student Question:

In what ways are you tempted to settle for the outward form of religion, the body without the breath, rather than the living power of the Spirit at work within you?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

When God opens their graves and raises them, then they shall know that I am the LORD (37:13). The resurrection reveals His identity and power.

I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land (37:14). The Spirit is the source of the new life.

Then you shall know that I am the LORD; I have spoken, and I will do it. The certainty rests wholly on God's faithful word.

This promise of God's indwelling Spirit reaches its fullness in the new covenant, where God gives His Spirit to dwell in His people through Christ.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The gift of God's Spirit within is the heart of the promise, for life comes not from law-keeping but from God's indwelling.
- This indwelling Spirit finds its fulfillment in the church, where God pours out His Spirit on those who obey the gospel and are baptized into Christ.
- I have spoken, and I will do it anchors the whole hope in the certainty of God's word, which never fails.

Discussion Prompts

- What is the significance of God placing His Spirit within His people?

- How does this promise find its fullness in the new covenant and the church?
- Why does God seal the promise with I have spoken, and I will do it?

Question 7

Student Question:

God explains the vision plainly, These bones are the whole house of Israel, who say our hope is lost, and He promises to put His Spirit within them so that they live (37:11–14). How does this promise of being raised, gathered, and given God's Spirit find its fulfillment in what God does for His people in Christ?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The LORD tells Ezekiel to take one stick and write on it For Judah, and another and write on it For Joseph, Ephraim, and the house of Israel (37:16).

He is to join them together into one stick, that they may become one in his hand (37:17). The sign acts out the reuniting of the long-divided people.

Since the days of Jeroboam the nation had been split into two kingdoms, Judah in the south and Israel in the north, never to be reunited politically.

The sign-act declares God's purpose to gather and make one what sin and division had torn apart, a single people belonging to Him.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The sign-act, like Ezekiel's others, dramatizes the certainty of what God will do, His word made visible.
- The joining of Judah and Joseph pictures the healing of division, an end to the rivalry and brokenness of God's people.
- The deeper fulfillment is the gathering of one people of God out of every division, accomplished in Christ who makes the many one.

Discussion Prompts

- What does the joining of the two sticks dramatize about God's purpose?
- Why is the long division of Judah and Israel the background to this sign?
- How does this picture of unity point beyond the two kingdoms to God's one people?

Question 8

Student Question:

Where do you most need to hear God's word, I will put my Spirit within you and you shall live, spoken over a dried and discouraged place in your own walk?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

When the people ask the meaning, Ezekiel is to say that God will make Judah and Joseph one stick in His hand, one nation, with one king over them all (37:19–22).

They shall no longer be two nations, no longer divided into two kingdoms, and never again defiled with their idols and transgressions (37:22–23).

I will save them from all their backslidings, and will cleanse them; and they shall be my people, and I will be their God (37:23).

The promise is of cleansing and covenant belonging, a purified people gathered under one rule, no longer enslaved to the idols that destroyed them.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- One king over one nation points to the reign of Christ, who gathers His people under His single saving rule, not to a restored earthly throne.
- The promised cleansing from idols and backsliding is the spiritual renewal God works in those He saves, fulfilled in the forgiveness that is in Christ.
- They shall be my people, and I will be their God is the covenant formula now realized in the church, the people God has made His own.

Discussion Prompts

- What does one king over one nation signify when read in the light of Christ?
- How is the promised cleansing from idols fulfilled in the gospel?
- What does the covenant formula, my people and their God, mean for the church?

Question 9

Student Question:

In 37:15–28 the LORD has Ezekiel join two sticks, Judah and Joseph, into one, promising one nation, one king, my servant David as their prince, His Spirit poured out, His sanctuary in their midst forever, and an everlasting covenant of peace. Working carefully through these verses, explain why we understand this restoration to be fulfilled spiritually in the church, the true and spiritual Israel, rather than in a literal future restoration of a political national Israel. Show from the New Testament how the one true Israel is defined by faith and not by flesh (Romans 2:28–29; 9:6–8; Galatians 6:16), how Jew and Gentile are made one new man in Christ (Ephesians 2:14–16), how my servant David points to Christ the one shepherd and king, and how the everlasting covenant is the new covenant in His blood (Hebrews 13:20). Why must we resist the dispensational and premillennial reading that looks for a rebuilt earthly kingdom and temple, and how does the sanctuary set in their midst forever speak rather of God dwelling among His people in Christ?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

My servant David shall be king over them, and they shall all have one shepherd (37:24). David had long been dead, so this points beyond him to a coming Son of David.

They shall walk in my rules and be careful to obey my statutes, the mark of a people truly renewed and obedient (37:24).

David my servant shall be their prince forever (37:25). The everlasting reign cannot be the rule of the historical David but of Christ, the Son of David.

Jesus is the one shepherd of John 10:16, who gathers other sheep into one flock, the fulfillment of this promise of one shepherd over God's people.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- My servant David points to Christ, the Son of David, who reigns now and forever as king and shepherd over His people.
- The forever of His reign rules out a temporary earthly kingdom and establishes the everlasting kingdom that is the church under Christ.
- The one shepherd gathering one flock is fulfilled, as Jesus Himself declares, in His gathering of Jew and Gentile into one body.

Discussion Prompts

- Why must my servant David refer to Christ rather than to the historical David?
- What does the word forever establish about the kingdom in view?
- How does Jesus, the one shepherd, fulfill this promise in John 10:16?

Question 10

Student Question:

Having studied the valley of dry bones raised to life and the two sticks made one, how will this vision of God's power to resurrect the dead and gather the divided shape your hope, your unity with fellow believers, and your confidence that the LORD who began this work will bring it to its everlasting completion?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

I will make a covenant of peace with them; it shall be an everlasting covenant (37:26). This is the new covenant established in the blood of Christ.

My dwelling place shall be with them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people (37:27), language taken up in the New Testament for God dwelling among His people.

I will set my sanctuary in their midst forevermore. The everlasting sanctuary is not a rebuilt stone temple but God dwelling among His people in Christ.

Then the nations will know that the LORD sanctifies Israel, when His sanctuary is in their midst forevermore (37:28), as His glory is made known through His people.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The everlasting covenant of peace is the eternal covenant in the blood of Jesus by which the God of peace makes His people His own (Hebrews 13:20).
- The sanctuary set forever in their midst is fulfilled in God dwelling among His people through Christ and His Spirit, not in a physical temple of the dispensational scheme.
- We resist the premillennial reading that looks for a rebuilt earthly kingdom and temple, for the New Testament shows these promises fulfilled spiritually in the church, the true Israel of God.

Discussion Prompts

- What is the everlasting covenant of peace, and where is it established?
- How is the promise my dwelling place shall be with them fulfilled in Christ and His church?
- Why do we read the everlasting sanctuary spiritually rather than as a future earthly temple?