

Handout: Ezekiel Lesson 13

Yahweh God shaped man from the soil of the ground and blew the breath of life into his nostrils, and the man became a living being.

Genesis 2:7

In Chapters 34-36:15, God promised three kinds of divine activity to restore security to the exiled covenant people when they return to the land of Israel:

1. God will restore security by removing predatory animals from the land. This promise reverses the earlier curse-judgment where wild animals are agents of judgment (Ez 5:17; 14:15, 21; 33:27).
2. God will restore security by blessing the land with rain and fruitfulness, repeating the covenant blessings of Deuteronomy 28:2-14. Famine will no longer ravage the land.
3. God will restore security by removing the oppression of foreign enemies. The significance of this action is that it suggests the restoration of the exiles as a “new Exodus.” The allusion to the first Exodus is recognizable in two expressions in verse 34:27c where Yahweh promises, *“I will break the bars of their yoke and rescue them from the clutches [hands] of their slave-masters.”* Those expressions recall the summary of the covenant blessing in Leviticus 26:13, *I, Yahweh your God, who brought you out of Egypt so that you should be their slaves no longer, and who broke the bonds of your yoke and made you walk with head held high.*

In Chapters 36:16 to 39:29, Yahweh continues giving Ezekiel His seven oracles of redemption for the covenant people and the amazing vision of the bones in the Valley of Death:

- Oracle 5: Oracle of redemption for the sake of Yahweh’s Holy Name (36:16-38). The vision of the dry bones (37:1-14).
- Oracle 6: Prophecy of the reunification of Israel (37:15-28).
- Oracle 7: The prophecies against Gog and Magog, and God’s glory among the nations (38:1-39:29).

Oracle 5 in 36:16-38 is in two parts:

1. The desecration of the Promised Land and Profaning God’s Name (verses 16-23).
2. God’s plan to restore His Name and Israel (verses 24-38).

The oracle recounts the bad present situation and God’s remedy. The oracle describes the bad present situation in two stages:

1. Israel’s “conduct and actions” that brought about a defiling of the land and caused their expulsion among the nations (verses 17-19).
2. Their expulsion caused a widespread desecration of God’s “holy name” among the nations (verses 20-21).

The key phrases in this section are “among the nations,” repeated six times (verses 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24) and “my holy name,” repeated four times (verses 20, 21, 22, 23). The phrase “not for your sake” in 36:22 and 32 is the key to understanding God’s motive for restoring Israel to the land.

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The covenant people defiled the Promised Land by many gross offenses listed in the Law, including:

- Unchastity (Lev 18:25-28; Dt 24:4)
- Unexpiated bloodshed (Num 35:34)
- Overnight exposure of an executed criminal (Dt 21:23)
- Setting up altars to worship idols (Ex 20:4-5; Dt 5:7-9)

The prophets regularly condemned fouling the land with idol worship (see Jer 2:7; Ez 5:11). The warning Yahweh gave for the offense of fouling the land with idol worship in Leviticus 18:25-28 was that the defiled land would vomit out its defilers. God repeats the fulfillment of the judgment in 36:18-19.

God announces His plan to restore Israel in 36:24-38:

1. He will gather them from among the nations and return them to their land (verse 24).
2. He will pour clean water over them to spiritually cleanse them of their guilt and the contamination by false idols (verses 25 and 33).
3. He will give them a new heart and a new spirit. Their new hearts will give them the spiritual strength they need to demonstrate their obedience to God's judgments and commandments (verses 26-27).
4. They will live in the land that is their ancestral heritage as God's covenant people (verse 28).
5. He will give them everything they need to prosper in the land to include rebuilding and populating their cities (verses 29-30).

Chapter 37: The Vision of the Valley of Death and the Dry Bones

The vision in Chapter 37 is Ezekiel's third visionary experience. The first was his inaugural vision of the Chariot of Fire and the scroll (1:1-3:15) and his second vision concerned the liturgical abuses taking place in Yahweh's Jerusalem Temple (8:1-11:13). The vision opens with the announcement of the "the hand of God" upon Ezekiel in verse 1 (same as other two visions) and concludes with the signature formula in verse 14. There is a break in verse 11 where the prophet's vision gives way to a series of interpretive comments. The vision divides into two parts:

Part 1: The vision of the valley of death and its dry bones (verses 1-10).

Part 2: The interpretation of the vision (verses 11-14).

The most significant keyword repeated nine times is *ruah*, a word that means "wind," "breath," or "spirit" (verses 5, 6, 8, 9 four times, 10, and 14). The other keyword in the passage is "life," repeated five times in verses 3, 5, 6, 9, and 10).

In verses 1-2, God's Divine Spirit catches up Ezekiel and relocates him to a valley of death filled with dry bones. Scripture does not identify the location of the valley. The scene is unique in three aspects:

1. Ezekiel's amazement at the very large number of bones suggests there was a huge catastrophe.
2. The bones are on the surface of the valley like the remains of corpses that did not receive a proper burial according to the Law. As an Israelite who was a priest, Ezekiel knew how important it was to provide a proper burial for human remains (Ez 39:12-16).

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3. Ezekiel expresses surprise at the extreme dryness of the bones which indicates they have lain exposed for a long time. God commands him to walk up and down on them to emphasize the complete absence of a life force.

Verses 4-10 divides into two parts:

Part 1: God instructs Ezekiel to summon the dry bones to attention and prophesy to the bones as if they were a living audience, alerting them to the impending activity of Yahweh (verse 5).

Part 2: God instructs Ezekiel to announce the process of restoring life to the bones in four stages: 1. He will reconnect the bones with sinews. 2. He will cover the bones with flesh. 3. He will overlay the flesh with skin. 4. He will infuse the total with breath/spirit (verses 7-10). The four stages are a reversal of the decomposition process that left the bones bare. The goal of the result is the infusion of God's ruah/breath/spirit in a spiritual revival. It is the recognition and relationship that Yahweh desires between the resurrected bodies and Himself.

The source of "the breath" of Yahweh in verse 9 is "the four winds." The "four winds" means "the four directions. It is the divine wind that blows in every corner of the earth, giving life to all creatures. Yahweh tells Ezekiel that the climax of the vision will be when the bones "come to life," repeated five times (verses 3, 5, 6, 9, 10).

Ezekiel 37:15-28 ~ Oracle 6: Ezekiel's Prophetic Act Prophesying the Reunification of Israel. God tells Ezekiel to join together two sticks that represent the Northern Kingdom of Israel (Joseph) and the Southern Kingdom of Judah. When the people ask "what is the meaning of the act," God commands him to answer in two stages concerning the metaphorical image of the sticks:

1. It is a metaphor representing God's intent to unite the remnants of the Kingdoms of Judah and Israel scattered among the Gentile nations. In his explanation, Ezekiel is to present the sticks to the sight of the people (verses 19-20).
2. The metaphor demonstrates that God is not only going to gather back Israel's scattered sheep (37:21; previously promised in 34:11 and 36:24), but He will reconstitute them as a single Kingdom with a single king forever (verse 22).

Verses 24-28 provide another Davidic Messiah prophecy and another prophecy of the future new and eternal covenant: *I shall make an everlasting covenant with you in fulfillment of the favors promised to David* (Is 55:3; also see Jer 31:31-34; 32:40; 50:5; Ez 16:60). From verse 25 to the end of the oracle each restored condition is to be eternal:

1. They will live in the land forever (verse 25b).
2. The Davidic Messiah will be their ruler forever (verse 25c).
3. God will make an eternal covenant of peace with them (verse 26a).
4. God will set His Sanctuary among them forever (verse 26c, 28).

The climax is in verse 26b-28 in which God promises His Sanctuary and His Divine Presence will dwell with His people forever in an eternal covenant. It is a promise fulfilled in Jesus Christ and His Kingdom of the Church (Heb 13:20; 2 Pt 1:11).