

Prophecy of the Valley of Dry Bones and the Two Sticks

From the time of Israel's exodus out of the land of Egypt, the nation refused to believe in Yahweh. Yes, they appreciated His miracle which enabled them to walk across the Red Sea protecting them from the Egyptian army. Exodus 14:31 tells us that as a result, Israel feared and believed in Yahweh. However, they did not really believe in Yahweh very long. So, they grumbled against Yahweh when they needed something. They were always glad when Yahweh responded to their grumbling by dropping food from heaven or causing water to flow from a rock in the wilderness. When they had the opportunity to enter the land that Yahweh had promised them once again, they did not trust Him. So, they were punished for their unbelief by walking another 38 years in the wilderness (compare Numbers 1:1; 10:11-12; 33:38; Joshua 14:10).

When the Israelites entered the Promised Land, they did not obey God by removing the inhabitants in the land. The book of Judges is a sad book for it reveals they wandered away from the Lord. 1 Samuel 8 tells us they did not want Yahweh to rule over them. They asked for a king just like the other nations had. After Yahweh gave them King Saul, King David, and King Solomon, they worshiped other gods. Therefore, God divided the

nation of Israel into two smaller kingdoms: a northern kingdom called Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah. All the kings of Israel proved to be wicked. Only some of the kings of Judah were righteous.

Then God sent numerous prophets to warn the people to return to Yahweh and repent or Yahweh would send two empires to invade their land, kill many of the people, and scatter them to the nations. Yahweh had told Moses that this would happen. Moses had shared Yahweh's warning with Israel just before they entered the land of Canaan. Deuteronomy 28:49 contains the prophecy that foreign nation would invade their land if they did not repent and obey Yahweh.

The LORD will bring a nation against you from afar, from the end of the earth, as the eagle swoops down, a nation whose language you shall not understand, a nation of fierce countenance who will have no respect for the old, nor show favor to the young. Deuteronomy 28:49 (NASB)

In verses 64-65, Yahweh warned that He would scatter them to the four winds. Here is the first part of verse 64,

Moreover, the LORD



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will scatter you among all peoples, from one end of the earth to the other end of the earth. Deuteronomy 28:64a (NASB)

That prophecy was partially fulfilled in 722 B.C. when the Assyrian Empire invaded the northern kingdom. Then again in 586 B.C., the Babylonian Empire invaded the southern kingdom and scattered the remaining 1/3 of the population.

Today the Jews are still scattered around the world. Only about 45 percent of Jews live in Israel. Then the United States has about another 45 percent of the world's Jewish population. The remaining 10 percent are scattered around the world.

The major prophets, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, made major prophecies that promise every living Jew will return to the land of Israel someday (Isaiah 59:19-21; Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 36:8-37:14). Zechariah 12:10-14:21 also contains such a prophecy. We have discovered many prophecies in the book of Ezekiel where Yahweh promised He will regather the Jews back to Israel.

In our last two studies, God promised that Israel will be regathered back to the land of Israel. This promise has been repeated many times. We have discovered that the regathering will occur after the second coming of Jesus Christ which will occur at the end of the tribulation. It must occur before the Sheep and Goat Judgment since Christ will determine at that judgment who will enter the millennial kingdom. Since every Jew who survives the tribulation will believe in Christ, this means that He will send every living Jew into His kingdom (Zechariah 12:10; Romans 11:25-26). Then during the millennial kingdom, the Messiah, Jesus Christ, will reign as king over the world.

Vision of the Valley of Dry Bones. This study is the major prophecy in the Old Testament about the regathering of the Jews. It is from Ezekiel 37. Chapter 37 is titled the "Valley of Dry Bones" because it begins with a vision about a valley that is filled with dry bones. The chapter has three sections. Verses 1-10 is the vision. Verses 11-14 is the interpretation of the dream. Verses 15-28 is about Israel in the millennial kingdom with God dwelling among them.

Here are the first two verses of the vision.

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. 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. Ezekiel 37:1-2 (NASB)

Immediately, Ezekiel said, "hand of the LORD was upon me." The expression "the hand of the Lord came upon" and variations of it tell us that Ezekiel had a vision. He was in the Spirit of the Lord or the Holy Spirit. Ezekiel saw a valley. The valley is not named because it is not a valley that exists on planet earth. It is only a valley that existed in the vision and it is full of bones.

Then the Lord moved Ezekiel among the bones. As a result, he discovered there were a great many extremely dry bones. The Hebrew word for "very in verse 2 is *meod*. It has the idea of greatly or exceedingly. That is, these bones were extremely dry. I told my wife that means these bones are dead! Then I laughed because they were obviously dead. The message is that these bones have been lying in the valley under the sun for a long time. They were symbolic of Israel which had been scattered among the nations since 586 B.C. and is scattered to this day. More than half of the Jews still live outside of Israel. It has been a long time.

Verse 3 is a question that Yahweh asked the prophet.

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

The Lord asked, "Can these bones live?" Ezekiel was wise. He said only the Lord God knows. Verses 4-6 now give Yahweh's reply.

Again He said to me, "Prophecy over these bones and say to them, 'O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD.' "Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones,

‘Behold, I will cause breath to enter you that you may come to life. 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.’ Ezekiel 37:4-6 (NASB)

Yahweh told Ezekiel to speak to the bones and announce that they were not going to be dead bones anymore. These bones were going to live again. Then again Yahweh said, “You will know that I am the Lord.”

Verses 7-10 tell us that the prophet prophesied.

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. And I looked, and behold, sinews were on them, and flesh grew and skin covered them; but there was no breath in them. Then 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 come to life.”’” 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. Ezekiel 37:7-10 (NASB)

This is amazing imagery. The valley full of dead bones comes to life. The bones are clothed with flesh and stood up. One could make a movie of this vision. Now remember that Yahweh had asked Ezekiel, “Can these bones live?” The prophet replied, “O Lord GOD, You know.” Now in verses 9-10, Yahweh made them come alive. This is a divine act.

It is a mistake to conclude anything about the meaning of these bones before we read the interpretation in verses 11-14. Yet, some claim that this vision teaches the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead. Amillennialists believe that is the message since they reject the interpretation given this prophecy in verses 11-14. The interpretation conflicts with their view of the future. So, they would have us believe that the resurrection of the dead is not taught elsewhere in the Old Testament. They say this vision would give these defeated and discouraged Jews hope and encouragement.

They refer to New Testament passages about the resurrection of the dead (1 Corinthians 15:1-58; Revelation 20:11-15) and then conclude that Ezekiel 37 is about the doctrine of the resurrection. But the resurrection of the dead is taught in the Old Testament. It is clearly taught in the last chapter of the book of Daniel (Daniel 12:2-3, 13). It is also taught in other Old Testament passages (Isaiah 26:19; Hosea 13:14), but not in this passage as we will soon discover in the interpretation in verses 11-14.

Interpretation of the Vision. The interpretation of the vision is given to us in verse 11-14. Here are verses 11-13.

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.’ 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. 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.”’ Ezekiel 37:11-13 (NASB)

Yahweh interpreted the dream for the prophet and for us. He said the bones symbolized the whole house of Israel. He gave this vision since the Jews in exile had lost hope for the future of their nation. The dry bones sends the message that the Jews will be scattered for a very long time. It will appear to everyone that the nation of Israel is dead. It has ceased to exist. That is one of the reasons amillennialism became popular. So Yahweh said to the Jews in exile, “I will bring you into the land of Israel.” Now that is a clear promise of a regathering of the Jews to the land of Israel. Next, Yahweh made the interpretation clearer in verse 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.” Ezekiel 37:14 (NASB)

There should be no doubt that the bones refer to the nation of Israel, because Yahweh said that He will place them in their own land. Now, it is absolutely clear that the Valley of Dry Bones is about the regathering of Israel back to their land (Ezekiel 36:24). This vision is not about the doctrine of the resurrection.

Object Lesson of Two Sticks. Then Yahweh gave Ezekiel an object lesson that is actually a prophecy. It begins in verse 15 and continues to the end of the chapter. Here are verses 15-16,

The word of the LORD came again to me saying, “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, ‘For

Joseph, the stick of Ephraim and all the house of Israel, his companions.” Ezekiel 37:15-16 (NASB)

In order to understand these two verses, it is important to remember that after King Solomon sinned by worshiping other gods, God punished him (1 Kings 11:1-13). The punishment also included God dividing the nation of Israel into two smaller kingdoms: the northern kingdom called Israel and a southern kingdom called Judah. That is the background to verse 15. But in verse 15 we read that the prophet was told to take two sticks and write Judah on one stick and Ephraim on another stick. Now why was Ezekiel told to write Ephraim and not Israel on the other stick? The answer is the name Ephraim was frequently used in the Old Testament to also refer to the northern kingdom of

EZEKIEL — THE GLORY OF THE LORD

Author: Ezekiel, son of Buzi
Date Written: 590 -- 570 B.C.

Glory of God		Destruction of Jerusalem Prophesied				Judgment of Gentile Nations		Restoration of Jerusalem											
1:1	3:27	4:1	7:27	8:1	11:25	12:1	19:14	20:1	24:27	25:1	32:33	33:1	48:35						
Introduction		1st Cycle Prophecies		2nd Cycle Prophecies		3rd Cycle Prophecies		4th Cycle Prophecies		Prophecies Against Israel's Enemies		Promised Land, Millennial Kingdom & Glory of God							
*				*								***							
First Vision				2nd Vision		12:1 “Word of the Lord” Occurs Predominately In This Section (54 of the 60 times in the book)						43:1 Third Vision							
Ezekiel Called		Certainty of Judgment		Necessity of Judgment		Justification of Judgment		The Justice of God Is Revealed		God Will Restore Israel For He Keeps His Promises									
Before the Babylonian Empire's Siege of Jerusalem (593 – 588 B.C.)								During & After Siege (588-585, 571 B.C.)		After the Siege (Future)									
Dates of Prophecies While In Chebar, Babylonian Empire (July 593 – March/April 571 B.C.)†																			
593 B.C.		593 B.C.		592 B.C.		592 B.C.		591 B.C.		589 B.C.		588 B.C.		586 B.C.		585 B.C.		573 B.C.	

*Visions of God with Cherubim.

**Prophecy about the Messiah.

***Prophecy about the fall of Satan.

****Prophecies about Israel's restoration, Valley of Dry Bones, and Battle of Gog and Magog.

†Ezekiel 29:17-21 was given in 571/570 B.C.

Israel. Hosea 4:16-17 shows us that the two names were used interchangeably. In addition, the two tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh were the most powerful tribes in the northern kingdom. They were the descendants of the sons of Joseph who had the same names: Ephraim and Manasseh.

Then in verses 17-19, Yahweh told Ezekiel to join the two sticks together.

“Then join them for yourself one to another into one stick, that they may become one in your hand. When the sons of your people speak to you saying, ‘Will you not declare to us what you mean by these?’ 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.” Ezekiel 37:17-19 (NASB)

Next Yahweh gave Ezekiel more instructions. He was to take the two sticks and join them together. When the two sticks touched each other, they would become one stick, just as if the prophet had performed a magic trick. Yahweh told Ezekiel that when the people asked him about the two sticks, he was to tell them what Yahweh had commanded him to do. The message of the illustration was to teach the Jewish exiles that the two kingdoms of Israel and Judah will be reunited as one nation in the millennial kingdom.

Verses 20-23 reveal Yahweh’s next statement to Ezekiel,

The sticks on which you write will be in your hand before their eyes. “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; 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. 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. Ezekiel 37:20-23 (NASB)

Now the prophet was told to go to the Jews in exile and hold the two sticks in his hands so that the people can see them. The sticks are not mentioned again. We can assume that while the exiles were watching, he made the sticks touch each other and become one. The sticks were an object lesson. After they became one, Ezekiel was to tell the exiles that Yahweh will regather all of the Jews together and return them to their own land.

Notice that the regathering is a clear reference to the regathering of Israel. Yahweh speaks of gathering the “sons of Israel from nations.” Then Yahweh refers to “their own land” and “make them one nation.” Then He says they will no longer be “two nations” or “two kingdoms.” So, the people will be gathered together and into one nation. The northern kingdom of Ephraim and the southern kingdom of Judah will cease to exist. They will be one people. Yahweh will gather together all of the Jews from the nations of the world who had survived the tribulation.

In addition, verse 23 says they will no longer worship other gods as they had in ages past. They will no longer sin. Yahweh will cleanse them. God says they will be “My people, and I will be their God.” The vision and object lesson echoes what Yahweh said in Ezekiel 36:24-28.

So, the prophecy of the dry bones means that God will keep His promise and regather every Jew from around the world back to Israel. But it will occur from the time the prophecy was given sometime in the distant future. The two sticks teach the same truth as the prophecy of the dry bones but it goes deeper and adds that every Jew from the kingdoms of Ephraim and Judah will also be regathered to the land of Israel. Then it adds that the two kingdoms will be combined into one nation. This is all part of the regathering. Finally, we are told every Jew will be saved or come to faith in Jesus Christ as their personal messiah and savior. They will be regathered for the purpose of becoming citizens of the millennial kingdom.

Why do we know they will be living in the millennial kingdom? The answer is—that is the message of verses 24-28. Here are verses 24-26.

“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. 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. I will make a covenant of peace with them; it will be an everlasting covenant with them. And I will place them and multiply them, and will set My sanctuary in their midst forever.” Ezekiel 37:24-25 (NASB)

We discovered earlier in the study “The King and the Characteristics of the Millennial Kingdom” (Ezekiel 34:23-31) that the expression “My Servant David” is another reference for the Messiah. Risto Santala in his excellent book about the Messiah in the Old Testament quotes the famous Jewish rabbi RaDaQ who explained that,

“My shepherd David means’ the Messiah-King. He is called David, because he is of David’s seed”¹

The gospels of Matthew and John agree and state that Jesus Christ is the Messiah (Matthew 1:1, 16-17; 2:4; John 1:41; 4:25). There are other Old Testament passages that reveal Christ is the Messiah also.

Then verse 24 says the Messiah will be Israel’s only shepherd, and every Jew will obey Him. Verse 25 adds that every Jew will live in Israel forever and the Messiah will be their prince forever. We also discovered in Ezekiel 34:23-31 that the term prince, which is *nasi* in the Hebrew, refers to a humble king. Imagine a humble king ruling over His people forever!

The Covenant of Peace in verse 26 refers to the New Covenant in full force (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 36:25-

28). It will merge together with both the Davidic Covenant (2 Samuel 23:5) and the Abrahamic Covenant (Genesis 17:7) forever - starting in the millennial kingdom and continuing into eternity. The last part of verse 26 prophesies a population explosion during the millennial kingdom just as Isaiah 65:20, 23; Ezekiel 36:37-38 do.

Conclusion. Verses 27-28 end this study with the promise that God will dwell among us in the millennial kingdom.

“My dwelling place also will be with them; and I will be their God, and they will be My people. And the nations will know that I am the LORD who sanctifies Israel, when My sanctuary is in their midst forever.” Ezekiel 37:27-28 (NASB)

Once again we are humbled by this amazing truth that our God wants to come and dwell with us. We will learn more about this in chapter 43. At that time we will visit a number of passages that reveal God looks forward to living with His Jewish and Gentile saints for He is our God. In the kingdom all believers will be called His people.

So, the message of Ezekiel 37 is that God will combine the northern and southern kingdoms together and gather every Jew back to the land of Israel. Christ will reign as their Messiah-King over them in the millennial kingdom and into eternity. Yahweh keeps His promises. Every believing Jew and Gentile has a glorious future when we dwell together with our God! Praise and thank the Lord!

Dr McGee quotes David Ben-Gurion as saying,

Ezekiel 37 has been fulfilled, and the nation Israel is hearing the footsteps of the Messiah.²

Ezekiel 37 has only started to be fulfilled. It will be completely fulfilled in the millennial kingdom. But he is correct, the footsteps of the Messiah started being heard when Israel returned to their land. His footsteps are getting louder. May Christ come quickly.

1. Risto Santala. The Messiah In the Old Testament. Karen Ahvah Meshihit. Jerusalem. 1992. p. 177.

2. J. Vernon McGee. Book of Ezekiel. Thru the Bible. Thomas Nelson Publishers. 1982. p. 514.