

Power to Restore

September 8, 2024

Lesson Summary

Main Passages

Ezekiel 37:1-14

Session Outline

1. The Vision (Ezekiel 37:1-3)
2. The Miracle (Ezekiel 37:4-10)
3. The Explanation (Ezekiel 37:11-14)

Theological Theme

God can do the impossible when we trust, believe, and obey Him.

Call to Action

We too can experience God's power and restoration, both in the already and not yet (Romans 8:18-25).





Leader Guide

Power to Restore

Introduction

Have you ever been out camping or hiking and come to an unstable looking section of trail? Maybe it was a rope bridge or log across a stream. Think about any precarious looking place you have needed to step out and cross over on foot. Typically, that first step is very tentative. You likely keep your second foot back on firm ground while you test out the rope, rock, or whatever you need to get you to the other side.

Once you have taken a few steps in without falling, you are usually able to step less cautiously and more confidently. As long as your footing remains steady, the next step is easier than the first. This is much the way it is with faith except you can always count on God and He will not let you down, no matter how it appears. When God calls you to step out in faith, although you may be uncertain due to circumstances, you can trust Him with each step. Today, we are studying a passage that teaches us more about trusting God, stepping out in faith, and seeing the miraculous as a result.

-  When have you experienced a situation like the one described here?
-  How did your steps become more or less confident as you proceeded?

Session Summary

Ezekiel had the privilege of being used by God to give hope to the people in exile. Through a prophetic vision, the Lord told Ezekiel He would restore the Israelites to their land. This was a seemingly impossible task, as they were currently struggling through exile in Babylon. To display what He was able to do, God showed Ezekiel a valley full of dry bones that had no life or hope of life apart.


When God has a plan for something to happen, no circumstance can prevent it from taking place. The Israelites were also dry and hopeless, they were without life. God used Ezekiel to prophesy over the bones, and they miraculously came together into a great army. Then God brought breath into them as a picture of how He was going to restore His people back to their land. The impossible can happen when we stop relying on circumstances or our own power and instead invite the Holy Spirit to do what only He can. After all, He is in the business of bringing life out of death.

1. The Vision (Ezekiel 37:1-3)

After months of being in exile with the children of Israel, Ezekiel was given a vision to encourage and revive the hope of restoration for God's people. While this experience was given to Ezekiel for the Israelites in exile, it has implications for us today as well.

Ezekiel was taken and placed into a valley of death. He saw piles of dry bones around him with no sign of life. This was an unusual place to find a Jew due to the restrictions they followed about contact with dead corpses. To this day in Israel, you can see where those who oppose Christianity have placed graves along the hillside leading up to the Eastern gate in an attempt to keep Jesus from coming back as prophesied by Scripture.

Ezekiel was led into a place he had no desire to be. Likewise, the children of Israel were in a place they had no desire to be, in exile. They faced the consequences of their own choices and were likely a bit surprised by the outcome despite their multiple warnings from God.

 How can you relate to being in a place you didn't want to be or wrongly believing you have more time to change course as the Israelites might have believed despite the warnings they were given?

In verse two the phrase "He led me all around" gives some insight for our lives. God didn't just send Ezekiel to the valley of death; He was there with him. God led Ezekiel through the bones for a reason and purpose. When you find yourself in a surprising or difficult situation, you can rest assured that God is with you. He has promised to not leave you or forsake you (Hebrews 13:5). Just as he did with Ezekiel, God has a purpose and plan for every step. In those moments, we are to act as Ezekiel and let Him lead as we learn from Him along the way.

- What is the difference in letting God lead you and seeking to do your own will with the approval of God?

The emphasis on the bones being so dry was a statement regarding death. Outside of a living body, bones are dead. The dryness of the bones indicated these bones were not just dead but have been so for a long time. There was no reason for hope that they would live again. Yet God asked the question of Ezekiel. This was a defining moment and challenged the faith of this priest to the exiles. Instead of taking a stand one way or the other, Ezekiel put it back on the Lord.

- Application: What are the places in your life that seem dead with no hope of restoration?

2. The Miracle (Ezekiel 37:4-10)

God responded by commanding Ezekiel to put his faith to action and prophesy to the bones. At this moment, Ezekiel had the choice of who he was going to listen to and follow. Would he obey the Lord or listen to his own thoughts or the voice of the world that likely told him this made no sense. When we face similar opportunities to trust God despite what we see, or conform to the world's ways, we must decide who we will listen to also.

- When have you experienced the choice between listening to the world or obeying God? What thoughts go through your mind in those times?


Ezekiel wasn't just told to prophesy vaguely; he was given the exact words to say to the dry bones. When God calls you to step out in faith, He doesn't desert you as you begin to act; He is with you all the way just as we see with Ezekiel. You can trust God to give you what you need as you obey His instructions.

God promised to put breath into the bones and cause them to live. These bones could never do that on their own. Ezekiel could never make them do that on his own. All Ezekiel spoke was grounded in the supernatural power of God. This was God's declaration His people could trust Him for the future in what seemed like a hopeless moment. This moment with Ezekiel would have a long lasting and far-reaching impact.

- When have you been witness to the unexpected work of God? How did that impact you or others?


Regardless of any doubts he may have experienced, Ezekiel obeyed. As he prophesied what God told him to say, the miraculous began to happen. Even if with a shaky and timid voice, Ezekiel was obeying, and God was working. Instructed to prophesy in a seemingly useless endeavor, Ezekiel witnessed incredible things.

Once the bones had come together and formed into bodies, God told Ezekiel to prophesy again. It wasn't enough that there were bodies if there was no breath in them. So, God told Ezekiel to call out the breath. He was to call on the Spirit to come and bring life to those who needed it desperately. In response, the valley of bones became an exceedingly great army full of life and power. They were ready to act on behalf of the One who gave them life.

 Application: What does this passage show you about the power and purpose of our obedience to God?


3. The Explanation (Ezekiel 37:11-14)

In these verses, God gave Ezekiel the explanation for what he witnessed. It isn't a stretch to acknowledge that the Israelites had been feeling dry, dead, and desperate for hope amid their exile and struggles. This vision validated their circumstances while revealing that restoration was coming. God was going to bring life from death and do what only He could.

 Where do you currently feel dry, dead, and without much reason for hope?

This miracle and revival of Israel would include being restored to the promised land. God had specifically chosen that portion of land for His people and was going to see them brought back to it. This restoration would bring joy to the exiles as well as the ones who remained in the promised land but were struggling. The exiles would be brought back to something even better than they previously experienced.


God intended the people to remember and acknowledge Him is the Lord. This is a reminder that when we face tough times, whether brought on by our own choices or not, there is always purpose in what God does. We can keep our eyes fixed on Him and recognize that He alone is the Lord and He can do great things no matter our circumstances when we listen to Him, trust and obey, and step out in faith.

 How would Ezekiel's vision give the people reason to persevere in seeking the Lord and His restoration?

The Meaning of the Vision

Ezekiel's vision of the dry bones portrayed in a vivid way Israel's miraculous restoration. In this vision the prophet saw a valley full of dry, disconnected bones, representing the scattered people of Israel. However, suddenly the bones began to come together, and tendons and flesh appeared on them. The breath of life then entered the corpses, and a multitude of living beings stood in the valley. In the same way the Lord would miraculously revive the nation of Israel. He would deliver them from the grave of exile, place His Spirit among them, and settle them once more in the promised land.




Finally, God promised to put His Spirit into the people to accomplish what He intended. Ezekiel could rest assured that none of what God was going to do relied on his or the people's power but in the power of God at work in them through the Holy Spirit of God. The breath in the revived bones was far beyond air, it was the Spirit of the Living God. When your circumstances seem impossible and your strength limited, you can rely on God to work in and through you.

-  Application: How can you seek to rely on the power of God instead of on your own strength?

Conclusion

God's vision to Ezekiel was powerful and life changing. He gave the people hope in the worst of times. This passage has strong implications for anyone who finds him or herself in a difficult or unwanted situation. Regardless of what brought about your tough times, God has a purpose and can do miraculous things in your situation.

Ezekiel's faith was challenged and strengthened by what happened in the valley of dry bones. Your faith can also be strengthened by circumstances that appear one way but are changed by who God is. You too can experience the power and restoration of God when you trust Him enough to step out in faithful obedience. Like for Ezekiel, the first step of faith makes the next step of faith a little easier as you move toward boldly proclaiming all that God is doing.

-  What situation or relationship do you need God to bring life into now?
-  How can you stop relying on your own strength and put your trust in the Spirit of God? How can we encourage one another in this as a group?
-  What has God told you to do that you've delayed in obeying? How will you respond?

Prayer of Response

Praise the Lord for caring about every aspect of your life and doing the impossible. Ask for wisdom to see His hand at work and not to believe your circumstances over Him.

Memory Verse

“I will put my Spirit in you, and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land. Then you will know that I am the Lord. I have spoken, and I will do it. This is the declaration of the Lord!” — Ezekiel 37:14

Additional Resources

- *Ezekiel* by J. Vernon McGee
- *Be Reverent* by Warren Wiersbe
- *Exalting Jesus in Ezekiel* by Landon Downden

Disciples Multiplying Disciples



Historical Context of Ezekiel

Purpose

The message of the book revolves around a pivotal event in the history of Israel—the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BC. Prior to the announcement of Jerusalem’s fall, Ezekiel’s message was characterized by judgment. In his scathing review of Israelite history, Ezekiel exposed the nation’s moral depravity and absence of spiritual concern (2:1–8; 8:7–18; 13:1–23; 17:1–21; 20:1–32). After the destruction of Jerusalem was complete and the nation was in exile, his message changed. He turned to a proclamation of hope, which is what the people then needed most. God would provide a new heart and a new spirit to enable the people to be faithful and avoid a future judgment (11:17–20; 36:26–28). The Lord would establish a new temple (chaps. 40–48) and a new way of worship for the people once they were restored.

Author

There is sufficient reason for maintaining that the prophet Ezekiel composed the book of Ezekiel in Babylon. The work demonstrates such homogeneity and literary coherence that it is reasonable to conclude that all editorial work was carried out by a single person, the prophet himself.

The inclusion of historical dates at the beginning of many of the oracles and prophecies in Ezekiel is another important unifying factor. The book is one of the most chronologically ordered books of the Bible. Thirteen times a passage is introduced by an indication of time. The common point of orientation for the dates given in Ezekiel is the exile of King Jehoiachin of Judah in 598/597 BC.

The occurrence of visions throughout the book (chaps. 1; 8–11; 40–48) is another strong argument in favor of its overall unity. Finally, stylistic features throughout the book strengthen the unity argument.

Setting

Ezekiel, son of Buzi, was among the approximately ten thousand citizens of Judah deported to Babylon when King Nebuchadnezzar invaded Jerusalem in 598/597 BC (2Kg 24:10–17). His prophetic call came to him five years later (the fifth year of King Jehoiachin’s exile), in 593 BC. He received his call at the age of thirty (1:1), the year he should have begun his duties as a priest (Nm 4:3). The last dated oracle in the book occurs in the twenty-seventh year of King Jehoiachin (29:17), thus indicating that Ezekiel’s ministry lasted twenty-two or twenty-three years. The prophet lived during one of the greatest crises in Israel’s history—the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple, plus the exile of Judah’s leading citizens to Babylon.

Special Features

The book of Ezekiel contains the divinely inspired prophecies of the prophet of the same name. These prophecies consist of oracles in the first person, giving the reader a sense of access to Ezekiel’s private memoirs. Written primarily to the exiles in Babylon, the prophecies equally emphasize judgment of sins and the promise of hope and restoration.

Extended Commentary

Ezekiel 37:1-14

37:1 The introductory phrase the hand of the Lord was on me indicates a new subject. The hand is often used metaphorically for power in Scripture. The arrival of the hand of the Lord upon the prophet speaks of the overwhelming force with which the prophet was seized by God. On the “hand of the Lord” coming upon Ezekiel to overpower him, see 1:3; 3:14; 8:1; 40:1. The work of the Spirit in transporting Ezekiel to a different location occurs in 3:14; 8:3; 11:1, 24; 43:5, indicating the beginning of a visionary revelation. As an Israelite trained in the priesthood, Ezekiel knew the importance of treating a human corpse properly. This vast array of skeletons left unburied (it was full of bones) reminded Ezekiel of the execution of the judgment curses for disobedience (Dt 28:26).

37:2 Bones that were very dry indicated that death had taken place long ago. Hence, life was obviously beyond resuscitation (1Kg 17:17–24; 2Kg 4:18–37; but see 2Kg 13:21). Dry bones are a metaphor for a downcast spirit in other biblical passages (Pr 15:30; 17:22).

37:3 Ezekiel was aware that God had the power to raise people from the dead (1Kg 17:17–24; 2Kg 4:18–37; Is 26:19; Dn 12:1–2). But these bones were dry, meaning that the flesh had decayed. This seemed to make resuscitation impossible (can these bones live?).

37:4–6 When the breath of life is breathed into a body, it comes alive (see Ps 119:25; Jn 6:63).

37:7–9 The four winds probably indicate the full power of the entering breath since the winds come from every direction. The picture reminds us of the creation event, where the Spirit of God hovered over the raw elements of the world, transforming it into a habitable earth (Gn 1:2).

37:10 The two-stage process of forming the physical body and filling it with the breath of life is patterned after the creation of Adam in Gn 2:7. The use of the same verb (Hb *naphach*) for “breathe into these slain” (Ezk 37:9) and “breathed . . . into his nostrils” (Gn 2:7) makes this correlation certain. In both cases the bodies did not come to life until they received an infusion of the Spirit (the words for wind, breath, and spirit are identical both in Hebrew and in Greek).

37:11 These bones symbolize the restoration of the whole house of Israel to its own land.

37:12–13 Continuing his explanation of the vision, God added a new dimension to the resurrection of the dry bones. He declared that he would open the graves of his people and take them from their place of burial, demonstrating the reality of national rebirth. Just as the events in the vision were miraculous, so will be Israel’s restoration. The vision showed that Israel’s new life depended on God’s power.

37:14 Both Elijah and Elisha were involved in resurrection events (1Kg 17:17–24; 2Kg 4:18–37; 13:20–21). The focus on the work of the Spirit expands on the meaning of the statement of Ezk 36:27. I will settle you in your own land picks up the theme from the exodus and conquest. It also explains Paul’s statement that the reincorporation of Israel into the community of faith was like “life from the dead” (Rm 11:15). The Jews who live in Israel today should not be viewed as fulfilling this prophecy. Rather, the prophecy will be fulfilled when God gathers believing Israelites to the land (Jr 31:33; 33:14–16) at the second coming of Christ (Mt 24:30–31).¹

References

1. Mark F. Rooker, “Ezekiel,” in *CSB Study Bible: Notes*, ed. Edwin A. Blum and Trevin Wax (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017), 1301.