

SMBC Youth Sunday School
Lesson: Ezekiel 37
Dry Bones

Setting the Stage:

The book of Ezekiel was self-titled by the prophet in the sixth century; he wrote the book to give a message of judgment to Israel and restoration for God. Ezekiel was also an exiled Judean who ministered among his fellow exiles in Babylon. In this book, Ezekiel reminded the Jews that their exile was the result of their continued disobedience to God. Through the covenant, they had been warned that God would discipline them if they were not faithful to him and his commands (Leviticus 26; Deuteronomy 28). God's pattern in Scripture is to judge, then purify, and ultimately restore and bless his people; this is a continued testament to his grace. This theme continues through the book, but Ezekiel emphasizes that though this exile and spiritual disconnectedness is real—it is not the end of the story for Israel. There is a future hope.

In the beginning of the book, God provides Ezekiel with an understanding of the rebellious nature in the people of Israel. He warns of impending judgment that will fall on Jerusalem and Judah because of their wickedness; this warning continues through chapter 24. Ezekiel continues to prophecy judgment for foreign nations. Chapters 25-33 detail the coming judgment.

In the midst of this book on God's judgment, a thread of redemption and restoration is continually woven. In Ezekiel 11, beautiful promises are penned for the Israelites; here they are reminded that God is their sanctuary. Ezekiel 11:18-19 says, "When they come there, they will remove all its detestable things and all its abominations from it. And I will give them one heart, and put a new spirit within them. And I will take the heart of stone out of their flesh and give them a heart of flesh" (NASB).

Ezekiel then moves from a section heavily devoted to judgment into a few chapters primarily concerning restoration and preparation. In chapter 36, God encourages Israel about the coming days; but also fully explains the reason they have been dispersed. God's holiness is a major theme in the book of Ezekiel, and Israel's sin was in direct contrast with God's very nature. This required punishment. The paragraphs leading up to Ezekiel 37 provide a clear picture of God rebuilding Israel physically and spiritually. God even reiterates in 36:27, "I will put My Spirit within you..." (NASB).

Summary:

The theme for this passage is God's grace through the promise of resurrection and restoration, both in a physical and spiritual sense. This is the Gospel and is evidenced throughout all of Scripture. Ezekiel specifically has the ability to prophesy to a nation that has rebelled against God, received consequences for their rebellion, and yet God promised to breathe life back into their dry bones. God not only physically restored the nation of Israel, but also repaired their severed relationship with himself. This reconciliation is God's plan for creation. God conquered death through Christ on the cross, and this picture is also seen in Ezekiel 37. God can breathe life into hopeless, dry bones—and not only will they physically be restored, but they will live! (See 2 Corinthians 5:16-17...we are new creations.)

Introduction:

How would you describe spiritual dryness? Have you ever been really excited about your faith (maybe at summer camp), yet four months later you do not seem to have much motivation to spend time with God? Maybe circumstances have come into play (parents' divorce, moving to a new city, etc); maybe it is choices you have made (lying to your parents, sexual sin with a boyfriend/girlfriend), or maybe it is

simply neglecting to place priority on God and the things of God (not being able to attend church, be with Christian friends, spend time in God's Word).

(There are three main characteristics of the dry bones we will look at today: they were dry, they were hopeless, and they were separated from one another.) It is easy to look around our schools, our sports teams, our culture, and even sometimes our Sunday School classes and see individuals who are dry, hopeless, and disconnected from Christian community.

We know the scripture has the power to make all things new and bring the dead to life, but sometimes we live as if that isn't true. Regarding our own personal sin and "death", it is easy to make excuses or justifications for the choices we make. It is easy to see God has a piece of the puzzle—one that fits perfectly into the hole of our lives to make it better. In reality, God calls us to die to our sin, take up our cross daily, and follow him. He doesn't work into our old self—he creates a new one!

It also affects the way we view other people—when you share your faith with people, do you make judgment calls about whether or not they will accept it first? Do we judge who may be "too far gone" for Jesus? The beauty of the Gospel is that no one is "too far gone"; and God makes us new.

Ask the students (largely rhetorically, but for discussion if needed):

- **Are you dry? Are you weary in relationship with Christ? Do you need new life breathed into you?**
- **Are you lonely or disconnected from God's Word or Christian community? Do you feel hopeless?**
- **Are you currently making choices that are distancing them from God? *If so, this message is for you!***

God put those dry bones back together and breathed life into them. It is time for revival! It is time for us, like it was for Israel, to be spiritually resurrected. When the Spirit of God is present; his people are enabled to live. This is the Christian hope.

Main Point: Dead men can't raise themselves; only God is able to raise the dead to life.

Study:

At this point in the book of Ezekiel, Israel would have understood that they were dry and needed "new life". Before you begin, emphasize that the importance of this "new life" in Christ is directly proportional to our recognition of our sin nature and need for restoration.

Verses 1-6

The main theme in this paragraph is God's ability and power to make the dead come alive. *Dead men can't raise themselves.* He leads Ezekiel to a valley full of dry bones and asks Ezekiel whether or not these bones can truly live. God commands Ezekiel to prophecy over the bones and commands the bones to listen to the word of God. God says in verse 5, "Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones, 'Behold, I will cause breath to enter you that you may come to life'" (NASB) God says that by this, "you shall know that I am the LORD" (Ezekiel 37:6 ESV).

Ask the Students:

- **Do you remember another time in the Old Testament that God breathed life into something? See Genesis 2:7**
- **What does this tell us about the source of life?**

God asks the question that the Israelites had been asking since the exile—can these dry bones live? Can we be restored? Will you breathe life into our nation and our souls again? God answers this question, that only through him and his power would the bones live. God is the one who causes these bones to live—not Ezekiel and not the bones themselves. Because of this, God will make himself known. There will be no explaining this new life other than the hand of God.

Ask the students:

- **Why do you think God asked Ezekiel this question?** God always wants us to be aware of his power and the way he works in our lives. God is also addressing the concern he knew was plaguing the Israelites—hopelessness. He was prefacing a miracle by asking Ezekiel to rely on him. This is a valid question. Essentially, the people are asking, ‘Is there hope for us?’ ‘Can our nation and relationship with God be restored?’ Is it possible for God to raise our dry, dead bones to life?
- **Do you believe there is any limit to God’s power?**

Verse 2 tells readers that there were many bones and they were very dry. All of these bones suggest some sort of battle; a plain full of dried bones would only be found after a massacre of sorts. Ezekiel details God’s judgment in the preceding chapters, and specifically in 6:5-7.

God asks Ezekiel in verse 3, “[C]an these bones live?” Ezekiel responded to God’s question, “O LORD God, you know.” The giving of life and new life is a responsibility and concern of God alone. Only he can raise people from the dead; this new life that Ezekiel sees is both spiritual and physical. Ezekiel trusts that God is sovereign and faithful to do his own will perfectly. In verse 4, God asks Ezekiel to prophesy over the bones; this must have seemed ridiculous since the bones were very dry; however, God commanded the bones to hear the word of the LORD and so they did.

Ask the Students:

- **What is the importance of God’s Word from this passage?** *Remember the creation account in Genesis. God’s Word is necessary for life, both physical and spiritual. We must hear from God and be filled with his Spirit to truly live.*

In verse 5, God tells Ezekiel that he will cause breath to enter the bones. The word “breath” is used multiple times throughout Chapter 37 to also mean “spirit” (verses 6, 9, 10). Each time this alludes to God as creator and life-giver. In the creation account from Genesis, God creates with his breath. Genesis 2:7 says, “Then the LORD God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being” (NASB). When God breathed life into man; he continued to bestow his image on the creation. In Ezekiel, God emphasized the importance of his reign over creation and his grace in giving new life. In verse 6, he continues to proclaim that he will rebuild these bodies flesh by flesh, so that Israel will know that he is God. This language, used throughout the book of Ezekiel, suggests that time and time again, God provides a clear picture of his nature for his people.

Ask the Students:

- **What are characteristics of God’s nature that we see in Ezekiel?**

Verses 7-10

Ezekiel prophecies as God commands, and the bones shake and come together with flesh. At this point the Lord God breathes his breath or spirit into the bones causing them to live and walk. This section focuses on the actual process of new life; these dry bones are placed together and ultimately live as

God's breath is breathed. Verse 9b (NASB) says, "Breathe on these slain, that they come to life," showing clearly that the breath causes the life. This is important because God is not as interested in an outer transformation as much as an inward one. The process was not complete when the bones and flesh simply came together; true life came when God breathed into them.

Ask the Students:

- **What is an example of an outward transformation?** Quit using bad language, quit using alcohol, begin sharing your faith, etc. **Inward transformation?** Dealing with anger issues in my heart, rooting out addictive tendencies in my life that are negative, discovering urgency for the Gospel and lost people. **Be sure to emphasize: An inward transformation ALWAYS results in an outer one.**

Verse 9 is also another evidence of the Trinity in the Old Testament. Like we mentioned earlier, "breath" is from the same Hebrew word as Spirit. The Spirit was here and breathing life into these bones.

Verses 11-14

In this passage God explains the vision to Ezekiel. He defines the terms and symbols and describes the impact of this vision on the people of Israel. The dry bones represent the entire house of Israel. They were dry and cut off from a life source during their national decline and exile. Because of the decline of Jerusalem and the Babylonian exile, the Israelite nation felt hopeless and cut off from worldly securities and the One, True God. God heard these cries and promised to respond.

In Ezekiel 33, God communicates to Israel that the punishment for their sin is death—they had no hope within themselves. He says in Ezekiel 33:10 (NASB), "Now as for you, son of man, say to the house of Israel, 'Thus you have spoken, saying, "Surely our transgressions and our sins are upon us, and we are rotting away in them; how then can we survive?" Other prophets echo these hopeless laments from Israel claiming that God has forsaken them.

In this hopeless state, God asks Ezekiel to give the message of hope to the Israelite people. In verse 12 he says, "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'" (NASB). God calls this wicked, rebellious nation "My people." Though he is holy and sovereign and perfect, he chose to call this nation "His." He chose to claim them as his own. He chose to open their graves and breathe new life into them.

The only other passage that uses this word in reference to a resurrection is 1 Samuel 2:6 which says "The LORD kills and makes alive; he brings down to Sheol and raises up" (NASB). Both this and the Ezekiel passage can provide great encouragement that God reigns over death and life. He can take a dead life, dry bones, someone in Sheol, and completely restore and revive it. He can "cause them to come up" and breathe breath into them. The essence of this word, (ala) , in every context, points upward. It affirms a hope that God will be faithful to these Israelites in exile, and it points to a future hope of Jesus Christ who will be the ultimate sacrifice and bring new spiritual life. An individual can only truly live when the Holy Spirit is present in their heart.

Christ Parallel:

Again, there are three primary characteristics about the bones in Ezekiel's vision: they were dry, they were hopeless, and they were separated from one another. This is central to understanding the depth of Israel's separateness and depravity. In spite of this depravity, there is a deep hope that comes from the obedience of Ezekiel in remaining faithful to his call; this is a reminder for ministers today on the

importance of presenting God’s Word accurately and effectively. In verses 1-14, God provides Ezekiel several reminders:

“Sin had brought about the death of the nation of Israel (Rom 6:23). Sin’s destructive power is most apparent on a personal level, where it destroys human lives (Ezek. 37:1-3; Eph. 2:1-22; 1 Pet. 1:3-12). Only God can produce life for those who are physically and/or spiritually dead (Ezek 37:3). Nothing but a miracle will resurrect the dead (John 11:25; 1 Cor. 15:1-58)” (Cooper).

This passage shows great importance and significance of the Spirit of God moving into a valley. God came into this low place, and restored life—this visual represents God coming into human life and sin and restoring it. This same author points out that the word for breath, “ruak”, is linked to the word Adonai (Spirit of the Lord), and represents a “supra-human, dominating, controlling, overwhelming, and energizing power.”

The Christ parallel here is that we, as humans are sinful. We have nothing on our own. Dead men can’t raise themselves. In our sin, God sent his Son, Jesus Christ to the earth to live perfectly, die for our sins, and be resurrected. Only because Jesus has conquered death, can he conquer spiritual death in our own lives. We are hopeless without the resurrection of Jesus. This is why Jesus tells Nicodemus in John 3 that he must be born again. He was physically born, but was dead in his sin. Nicodemus, like us, couldn’t raise himself. He needed life again. He had to be reborn in order to truly live. The same holds true for us.

Please see the following Scripture for a few examples of these truths:

- Romans Road: Romans 3:23; 3:10; 6:23; 5:8; 10:9; 10:13; 5:1; 8:1: 8:38-39
- Ephesians 2:1-10
- **1 Corinthians 15:12-58 (This one emphasizes the importance of the resurrection of Jesus in order that our dry bones may live.)**
- John 11:25
- Philippians 2:1-10
- 2 Corinthians 5:17

Application:

The biggest question that students need to wrestle with is: **Are you truly living?** All of the questions mentioned above and the following should help point to that. If your group is having a particularly vulnerable moment—feel free to ask them that question, point blank. This is a great opportunity to share the Gospel with individuals in your groups who may need a spiritual nudge.

Some individuals in your class can relate to the helpless, cut off state of these bones and of Israel. Some have never accepted God’s extended hand toward them. Some of them have not prayed outside of church or picked up a *Bible* in months. Some might fear that once they connect with God that they will actually have to stop living the lifestyle they have been living. Remind them—even the driest bones are not out of the reach of God. Our God is powerful enough and gracious enough to breathe life back into the most helpless and driest of lives.

Discuss with Students:

1. **What characterizes the dry bones in this passage? How would you describe spiritual dryness?**
Use this time to discuss all of the things that can so easily distract us from our walk with the Lord. Maybe it is busyness; maybe a need for re-prioritizing our time. Maybe it is a lack of true, Christian community and accountability. Maybe it is sin. When we are dry—there is something that has contributed to it. For the Israelites, it was continual rebellion. What is it for us?

2. **Contrast a life of spiritual dryness and death with one of real spiritual life. Why does this “new life/breath” matter? Does it change us?**
3. **In this passage, the bones were not truly living until God breathed life into them. We discussed a difference between inward transformations versus outward ones. Which type is more time consuming? (Inward) Which type is more transformative and lasting? (Inward) Why do we spend so much more time on the external changes before we’ve allowed the Lord to change our hearts?**
4. **Why is the resurrection of Jesus important? (1 Cor. 15:12-20)**
5. **Compare yourself to the dry bones: do you feel dry, hopeless or separated from God? Be prepared to field a number of responses for this question. Answers could include: providing specific Scripture passages that point to God’s promises in hopeless situations, suggesting next steps in student’s personal time with the Lord as it relates to prayer or Bible study; or work to connect students with one another for godly encouragement and community.**

Resources:

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Cooper, Lamar Eugene. *The New American Commentary: Vol 17*. Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994.

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Jamieson, Robert, Fausset, A.R., & David Brown. *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible*. Web page.

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