Ezekiel 37

Dry Bones Live: One Stick, One Shepherd

OBSERVATION · INTERPRETATION · APPLICATION

"These were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so."
Acts 17:11

CHAPTER THEME

God took Ezekiel to the deadest place imaginable and asked if it could live. The Word put the bones together, but only the Breath of God made them stand. A people who said "our hope has perished" are raised, reunited under one Shepherd, cleansed, and given God's own presence forever.

Ed Smith · Started 20 October 2026

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00 The Text

EZEKIEL 37 (KJV), MARKED

▲ Gold God — His character & actions | Green Command / instruction | Sky Key repeated word
⚠ Rose Sin / warning | ★ Violet Promise / blessing | Amber Time / place / contrast

1 ▲ The hand of the LORD was upon me, and carried me out in the spirit of the LORD, and set me down in the midst of the valley which was full of bones,

2 And caused me to pass by them round about: and, behold, there were very many in the open valley; and, lo, ⚠ they were very dry.

3 And he said unto me, Son of man, ⇄ can these bones live? And I answered, ▲ O Lord GOD, thou knowest.

4 Again he said unto me, Prophesy upon these bones, and say unto them, Green O ye dry bones, hear the word of the LORD.

5 Thus saith the Lord GOD unto these bones; Behold, ★ I will cause breath to enter into you, and ye shall live:

6 And I will lay sinews upon you, and will bring up flesh upon you, and cover you with skin, and put ⇄ breath in you, and ye shall live; and ▲ ye shall know that I am the LORD.

7 Green So I prophesied as I was commanded: and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and behold a shaking, and the bones came together, bone to his bone.

8 And when I beheld, lo, the sinews and the flesh came up upon them, and the skin covered them above: but there was no ⇄ breath in them.

9 Then said he unto me, Prophesy unto the wind, prophesy, son of man, and say to the wind, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Come from the four winds, O ⇄ breath, and ⇄ breathe upon these slain, that they may live.

10 So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the ⇄ breath came into them, and they lived, and ★ stood up upon their feet, an exceeding great army.

11 Then he said unto me, Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel: behold, they say, ⚠ Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost: we are cut off for our parts.

12 Therefore prophesy and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, O my people, ★ I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel.

13 And ye shall know that I am the LORD, when I have opened your graves, O my people, and brought you up out of your graves,

14 And ★ shall put my spirit in you, and ye shall live, and I shall place you in your own land: then shall ye know that ▲ I the LORD have spoken it, and performed it, saith the LORD.

15 The word of the LORD came again unto me, saying,

16 Moreover, thou son of man, take thee one stick, and write upon it, For Judah, and for the children of Israel his companions: then take another stick, and write upon it, For Joseph, the stick of Ephraim, and for all the house of Israel his companions:

17 And Green join them one to another into one stick; and they shall become one in thine hand.

18 And when the children of thy people shall speak unto thee, saying, Wilt thou not shew us what thou meanest by these?

19 Say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I will take the stick of Joseph, which is in the hand of Ephraim, and the tribes of Israel his fellows, and will put them with him, even with the stick of Judah, and make them one stick, and they shall be one in mine hand.

20 And the sticks whereon thou writest shall be in thine hand before their eyes.

21 And say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I will take the children of Israel from among the heathen, whither they be gone, and will gather them on every side, and bring them into their own land:

22 And ★ I will make them one nation in the land upon the mountains of Israel; and one king shall be king to them all: and they shall be no more two nations, neither shall they be divided into two kingdoms any more at all:

23 ⚠ Neither shall they defile themselves any more with their idols, nor with their detestable things, nor with any of their transgressions: but I will save them out of all their dwellingplaces, wherein they have sinned, and ▲ will cleanse them: so shall they be my people, and I will be their God.

24 And David my servant shall be king over them; and ★ they all shall have one shepherd: they shall also walk in my judgments, and observe my statutes, and do them.

25 And they shall dwell in the land that I have given unto Jacob my servant, wherein your fathers have dwelt; and they shall dwell therein, even they, and their children, and their children's children for ever: and my servant David shall be their prince for ever.

26 Moreover ★ I will make a covenant of peace with them; it shall be an everlasting covenant with them: and I will place them, and multiply them, and ★ will set my sanctuary in the midst of them for evermore.

27 My tabernacle also shall be with them: yea, I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

28 And the heathen shall know that ▲ I the LORD do sanctify Israel, when my sanctuary shall be in the midst of them for evermore.

Marked in the text

- **v1** ▲ The hand of the LORD was upon me
- **v1** the valley which was full of bones
- **v2** ⚠ they were very dry
- **v3** can these bones live
- **v3** ▲ O Lord GOD, thou knowest
- **v4** O ye dry bones, hear the word of the LORD
- **v5** ★ I will cause breath to enter into you, and ye shall live
- **v5** breath *(every occurrence)*
- **v6** ▲ ye shall know that I am the LORD
- **v7** So I prophesied as I was commanded
- **v8** ⚠ but there was no breath in them
- **v9** Come from the four winds, O breath
- **v10** ★ stood up upon their feet, an exceeding great army
- **v11** ⚠ Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost
- **v12** ★ I will open your graves
- **v14** ★ shall put my spirit in you, and ye shall live
- **v14** ▲ I the LORD have spoken it, and performed it
- **v17** join them one to another into one stick
- **v22** ★ I will make them one nation
- **v23** ⚠ Neither shall they defile themselves any more with their idols
- **v23** ▲ will cleanse them
- **v24** ★ they all shall have one shepherd
- **v26** ★ I will make a covenant of peace with them
- **v26** ★ will set my sanctuary in the midst of them for evermore
- **v28** ▲ I the LORD do sanctify Israel

Marks are drawn on the KJV text. Quotations in the notes are from the NASB95, so their wording may differ from the KJV above.

01 Observation

WHAT DOES THE TEXT SAY?

KEY VERSE · EZEKIEL 37:1 (KJV)

1 ▲ The hand of the LORD was upon me, and carried me out in the spirit of the LORD, and set me down in the midst of the valley which was full of bones,

Setting

The news has reached the exiles in Babylon: "The city has been taken" (33:21). Jerusalem and the temple are gone (586 BC), and the northern kingdom was swept away by Assyria more than a century before. Ezekiel, a priest taken captive with King Jehoiachin in 597 BC, speaks to people who feel like a graveyard. Chapter 36 promised a new heart and God's Spirit within (36:26–27); chapter 37 shows that promise in a picture. The vision is not dated.

Structure

- vv1–3 — **the valley of bones:** "The hand of the LORD was upon me" (v1), and He "set me down in the middle of the valley; and it was full of bones" (v1) — "and lo, they were very dry" (v2). God asks, "Son of man, can these bones live?" Ezekiel answers, "O Lord GOD, You know" (v3).
- vv4–6 — **prophesy to the bones:** "O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD" (v4). "I will cause breath to enter you that you may come to life" (v5) — sinews, flesh, skin and breath, "and you will know that I am the LORD" (v6).
- vv7–8 — **bodies without breath:** "So I prophesied as I was commanded" (v7). "There was a noise, and behold, a rattling; and the bones came together, bone to its bone" (v7). Flesh and skin cover them, "but there was no breath in them" (v8).
- vv9–10 — **prophesy to the breath:** "Prophesy to the breath, prophesy, son of man" (v9). "Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain, that they come to life" (v9). "They came to life and stood on their feet, an exceedingly great army" (v10).
- vv11–14 — **the vision explained:** "these bones are the whole house of Israel" (v11). They say, "Our bones are dried up and our hope has perished. We are completely cut off" (v11). God answers: "I will open your graves and cause you to come up out of your graves, My people" (v12). "I will put My Spirit within you and you will come to life" (v14). "I, the LORD, have spoken and done it" (v14).
- vv15–20 — **two sticks made one:** one stick "For Judah and for the sons of Israel, his companions," the other "For Joseph, the stick of Ephraim and all the house of Israel, his companions" (v16). "Join them for yourself one to another into one stick, that they may become one in your hand" (v17). The people ask, "Will you not declare to us what you mean by these?" (v18). God: "they will be one in My hand" (v19).
- vv21–23 — **one nation, cleansed:** God will gather Israel from the nations (v21). "I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel; and one king will be king for all of them" (v22). "They will no longer defile themselves with their idols" (v23). "I will deliver them from all their dwelling places in which they have sinned, and will cleanse them" (v23).
- vv24–28 — **David, the covenant, the sanctuary:** "My servant David will be king over them, and they will all have one shepherd" (v24). "David My servant will be their prince forever" (v25). "I will make a covenant of peace with them; it will be an everlasting covenant with them" (v26). God "will set My

sanctuary in their midst forever" (v26). "My dwelling place also will be with them" (v27). "The nations will know that I am the LORD who sanctifies Israel" (v28).

Repeated words

bones (vv1, 3, 4, 5, 7, 11); breath (vv5, 6, 8, 9, 10); Spirit (vv1, 14); prophesy / prophesied (vv4, 7, 9, 10, 12); graves (vv12, 13); one stick (vv16, 17, 19); know that I am the LORD (vv6, 13, 28); David (vv24, 25); forever (vv25, 26, 28); sanctuary (vv26, 28).

Contrasts

very dry bones (v2) ⟷ an exceedingly great army (v10). Bodies with flesh but "no breath in them" (v8) ⟷ "the breath came into them" (v10). "Our hope has perished" (v11) ⟷ "I will open your graves" (v12). Two sticks, two kingdoms (v16) ⟷ "one in My hand" (v19). Defiled by idols (v23) ⟷ cleansed and "My people" (v23). Many failed kings ⟷ "one shepherd" (v24). A temple destroyed (33:21) ⟷ "My sanctuary in their midst forever" (v26).

Chapter theme (my words)

God took Ezekiel to the deadest place imaginable and asked if it could live. The Word put the bones together, but only the Breath of God made them stand. A people who said "our hope has perished" are raised, reunited under one Shepherd, cleansed, and given God's own presence forever.

02 Interpretation

WHAT DOES THE TEXT MEAN?

KEY VERSE · EZEKIEL 37:3 (KJV)

3 And he said unto me, Son of man, ⇄ can these bones live? And I answered, ▲ O Lord GOD, thou knowest.

The valley (vv1–3)

This was a vision — "the hand of the LORD" and "the Spirit of the LORD" carried Ezekiel there. Feinberg, in Guzik: "The mention of the hand of the Lord indicates prophetic ecstasy and inspiration." Taylor, in Guzik, notes the valley is "the same word as the 'plain' in Ezekiel 3:22," where Ezekiel had seen God's glory. The bones are unburied and very dry — long dead, a scene of disgrace. Block, in Guzik: "Ezekiel knew how important was the proper treatment of human corpses." For a priest, a field of corpses was unclean ground. God's question exposes the impossible; Ezekiel's answer, "O Lord GOD, You know," is neither doubt nor bluster — it puts the matter in God's hands.

The Word, then the Breath (vv4–10)

Ezekiel is told to preach to bones — a ridiculous assignment unless God is in it. Spurgeon, in Guzik: "If we want revivals, we must revive our reverence for the Word of God." The bones rattle and assemble, sinews and flesh and skin come — but no breath. Guzik sees restoration coming in stages. Then a second command: prophesy to the breath. The Hebrew *ruach* means breath, wind and spirit, and the chapter uses all three (vv1, 5, 9, 14). Guzik reads the two steps as preaching followed by prayer. Meyer, in Guzik: "When you have done your best, and have failed of the highest results, prophesy to the Spirit."

Morgan, in Guzik: "There is no hope for humanity in man." The scene echoes Genesis 2:7 — a body formed first, then God's breath, then life.

"Our hope has perished" (vv11–14)

God interprets the vision Himself: the bones are "the whole house of Israel" — north and south — and they have said their hope is gone. God answers their words directly: He will open their graves, bring them home, and put His Spirit within them (36:27). Wright, in Guzik: "The resurrection that follows does not refer directly to individual resurrection from death." Guzik agrees the passage is "undeniably" about Israel's national restoration, though resurrection language is the picture God chose (compare Dan 12:2). Christians apply it differently. Many dispensational readers see Israel's modern regathering as the bones coming together, with the breath — national faith in Messiah — still to come (Zech 12:10; Rom 11:26). Many amillennial readers see the return from Babylon as a first fulfillment and the church's new birth by the Spirit as its fullness (John 3:5–8; Eph 2:1–5). Guzik expects a future fulfillment for Israel in "the very last days," saying that "any fair examination of Israel's history must confess that it has not yet happened."

Two sticks (vv15–20)

Israel had been split since Rehoboam (1 Kgs 12), roughly 350 years. Judah was the southern kingdom; "Joseph" and "Ephraim" stand for the northern tribes. Clarke, in Guzik: "Jeroboam, the first king of the ten tribes, was an Ephraimite." Guzik notes the northern kingdom had been conquered by Assyria about 150 years earlier, yet God still counts it. He rejects both the "lost ten tribes" theory and the Mormon reading. Smith, in Guzik: "Certainly no basis exists in this text for the strange Mormon teaching that the sticks refer to two scrolls." The sticks are tribes, and God's hand makes them one. Vawter and Hoppe, in Guzik: "Despite the prophet's words and various attempts, the divisions between north and south remained" — which is why this looks beyond the return under Cyrus.

One king, one Shepherd, one covenant (vv21–28)

God promises gathering, unity, cleansing from idols, and "one king." "My servant David" lived four centuries earlier, so most commentators see the Messiah, the Son of David (Jer 23:5; 30:9; Luke 1:32–33; John 10:11, 16). Guzik notes that view but holds that the reference is "most appropriately seen" as David himself, raised and ruling under Christ in the Millennial Kingdom. The "covenant of peace" (v26) is the new covenant; Guzik calls it "the covenant that never ends" and links it to Hebrews 13:20. Block, in Guzik, describes this peace as "a state of harmony and equilibrium." The sanctuary in their midst forever prepares for the temple vision of chapters 40–48. Smith, in Guzik: "The restoration of the sanctuary is the climax of all that this prophet had to say." Christians differ here too: some expect a literal millennial temple, others see the promise fulfilled in Christ who "dwelt among us" (John 1:14) and in God dwelling with His people (2 Cor 6:16; Rev 21:3). Either way the goal is the same — God with His people. Alexander, in Guzik: "Then all nations would see that it was the Lord who made Israel holy."

Word study (Hebrew)

- **bones — *ʿetsem* (H6106):** bone; also substance, the self.
- **dry — *yabesh* (H3002):** to be dried up, withered.
- **prophesy — *naba*ʾ (H5012):** to speak or preach as God's spokesman.
- **breath / wind / Spirit — *ruach* (H7307):** breath, wind, spirit — the key word of the vision.
- **sinews — *gid* (H1517):** a tendon, sinew.
- **rattling — *raʿash* (H7494):** a shaking, quaking, commotion.
- **come to life — *chayah* (H2421):** to live, revive, be restored to life.

- **army — *chayil* (H2428):** strength, a force, an army.
- **hope — *tiqvah* (H8615):** hope, expectation — literally a cord.
- **cut off — *gazar* (H1504):** to cut, sever, divide.
- **graves — *qeber* (H6913):** a grave, burial place.
- **stick — *ʿets* (H6086):** wood, a piece of wood.
- **shepherd — *roʿeh* (H7462):** to tend, pasture; a shepherd.
- **peace — *shalom* (H7965):** wholeness, well-being, peace.
- **everlasting — *ʿolam* (H5769):** long duration, forever.
- **sanctuary — *miqdash* (H4720):** a holy place, sanctuary.
- **dwelling place — *mishkan* (H4908):** a dwelling, the tabernacle.

Cross-references

Gen 2:7; 1 Kgs 12:16–20; Ps 104:30; Isa 26:19; Jer 23:5–6; Jer 30:9; Jer 31:31–34; Ezek 34:23–25; Ezek 36:24–28; Dan 12:2; Hos 3:5; Hos 13:14; Zech 12:10; Luke 1:32–33; John 3:5–8; John 5:25; John 10:11, 16; John 20:22; Acts 2:1–4; Rom 8:11; Rom 11:26–27; 2 Cor 6:16; Eph 2:1–5, 14–16; Heb 13:20; Rev 21:3.

03 Application

HOW DOES IT CHANGE ME?

KEY VERSE · EZEKIEL 37:5 (KJV)

5 Thus saith the Lord GOD unto these bones; Behold, ★ I will cause breath to enter into you, and ye shall live:

Command to obey — "Prophesy to the breath"

(v9). Ezekiel did two things: he spoke God's Word to dead bones, and he called on the Spirit to breathe. I can teach a man the Bible until he knows all the right answers and still find "no breath in them" (v8). My job is to keep doing both — speak the Word faithfully and pray for the Spirit without quitting.

Sin to confess — "Our hope has perished."

I've said it in my own way about my own valleys, and I've thought it about men I love — this one is too far gone, this marriage is over, this addiction will win. That is unbelief dressed up as realism. I confess it and answer God's question the way Ezekiel did: "O Lord GOD, You know."

Warning to heed — bodies without breath

The bones came together and looked like men, but they were still dead (v8). A man can clean up, get sober, show up to church, quote verses — and still not have new life. So can I. Reformation is not resurrection. Only God's Spirit makes the dead live.

Promise to trust — "I will open your graves"

(v12). I've sat across from men who say, "We are completely cut off" — men in a prison yard, men just released with nothing, men who have burned every bridge. God's answer is not a pep talk. It's resurrection: "I will put My Spirit within you and you will come to life" (v14). No valley is too dry and no man too dead.

Example to follow — Ezekiel's obedience

"So I prophesied as I was commanded" (v7). It looked foolish to preach in a graveyard. He did it anyway, and then did it again. I'll keep writing, building tools and sitting with men when it looks like nothing is moving, because the rattling starts when God's Word is spoken.

Worship

The Lord GOD raises the dead. He breathes life where there is none. He gathers the scattered, makes the divided one, cleanses the defiled, and gives them one Shepherd forever. He has spoken, and He has done it.

Prayer

Lord GOD, You know whether these bones can live. Breathe on me again. Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on the men I walk with — the ones in recovery, the ones behind bars, the ones who say their hope is gone. Open their graves, put Your Spirit within them, and make them stand. Make us one under Jesus, our one Shepherd. Amen.