

The Valley Of Dry Bones

Introduction. The word “dry” has different meanings in different contexts. If we are told that something is “dry,” that may refer to infrequent rain, to a certain type of humor, or to a prohibition against the sale of alcoholic beverages.

If we speak of going through a dry time spiritually, however, the meaning is quickly grasped. Everyone has had such a period, a time of discouragement when one’s relationship to God seems to have grown stale. This can be brief, or it can grow deeper into a “dark night of the soul” experience, a time of depression without relief. Those are dry times.

David hinted at a time like this in Psalm 63:1. His life was at risk, and he had been driven away from his home. He longed to be back in Jerusalem to worship God in the sanctuary. Yet he met this dry time with a response that can teach us so much. He did not wallow in discouragement, but he recalled that God had never abandoned him, that he had been in the shadow of God’s protective wings (Psalm 63:7).

Other than the opening vision of the wheel in the middle of the wheel, the first half of Ezekiel 37 is probably the best known portion of this otherwise unfamiliar book. Celebrated in the slave spiritual, “Dem bones, dem bones,” vss. 1-14 recount Ezekiel’s testimony to the power of God to reanimate skeletons of people long dead. This has great ramifications for all of us, especially the ones who are in a spiritually dry time.

I. *The Vision*

- A. If the vision can be dated with the prophecies beginning in 33:21, then this would have occurred early in the year 585 B.C. -- after all the children of Israel had been taken into captivity.
- B. Chapters 36-39 enumerate terrific spiritual blessings for the children of Israel. In 37:1-10, Ezekiel sees, not a normal valley, but one full of bones -- it is a picture of death. It is presented as the site of a long-ago catastrophe. The bodies have been left exposed to the elements and to wild animals. All the flesh is gone, and only the bones remain.
- C. Ezekiel does exactly as he was commanded and proclaimed the Lord’s words to the dead, dry bones. Countless generations of preachers since Ezekiel have joked about preaching to unresponsive congregations, but Ezekiel experienced this beyond measure! While he was speaking, all the bones came together, complete with tendons, flesh and skin, but no breath was found in them.
- D. Ezekiel was instructed to prophesy again, this time for the breath to come from the four winds so that these dead ones might live. Upon doing so, Ezekiel saw this army of people come alive.

II. ***The Interpretation***

- A. In vss. 11-14, God explained this dramatic experience to Ezekiel in straightforward terms. The dry bones symbolized the state of being of Israel at this point in history. The Israelites were once a united body but that body was cut to pieces.
- B. Premillennialists see this as a great gathering of Israel at the end of time. In fact, comments like Warren Wiersbe's are common: "This does not teach a bodily resurrection, or even the salvation of the Jews. Rather, it pictures the future revival of the nation, when the Jews will be brought up out of the 'graves' of the Gentile nations where they have been scattered. Politically, this took place on May 14, 1948, when the modern nation of Israel entered the family of nations again. Of course, the nation is dead spiritually; but one day when Christ returns, the nation will be born in a day and be saved."
- C. However, God speaks of a spiritual restoration under the New Covenant. Because of the preaching of the gospel, we are "revived" or "born again" and become a part of the "Israel of God" (Galatians 6:16).
 - 1. In contrast to the beliefs of some, the phrase "open your graves" does not refer to the resurrection at the end of time, but to their politically dead state, primarily in Babylon.
 - 2. The Jews regarded the lands of their captivity and dispersion as their "graves," and their restoration was to be as "life from the dead" (Romans 11:15).
- D. Being "born again" is the process of regeneration.
 - 1. Although the word is actually used only twice in the New Testament (Matthew 19:28; Titus 3:5), many synonymous passages suggest its basic meaning.
 - 2. We are quickened (John 5:21), begotten (1 John 5:1), made a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17), made a new man (Ephesians 4:24), put off the body of sin (Colossians 2:12), given a new life (Romans 6:4), and possess the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4).
- E. There are three passages that really help us to put the process of redemption into perspective (John 3:5; Ephesians 5:26; Titus 3:5).
 - 1. Being born of water indicates a birth via baptism. It is in baptism that we rise to walk in newness of life and that our sins are washed away (Romans 6:3-4; Acts 22:16). Furthermore, baptism saves us (1 Peter 3:21). Baptism is the only action in the Bible which uses water as its basis or medium.
 - 2. Being born of the Spirit simply means that as one reads the words that the Spirit has revealed, they repent of their sins and live righteously (John 16:7-8). The mysterious nature of inward change

- in John 3:8 means that one can see the outward effects of the new birth, but they cannot see the change it produces in the heart.
- F. All three passages are parallel to one another. They explain redemption in slightly different terms. All three passages combine to show how the Holy Spirit presently works in mankind's salvation, and all three passages show that baptism is necessary to one entering the kingdom, being sanctified and cleansed, and being saved. After this takes place, one is truly "made alive."

Conclusion. In Ezekiel 36:25-27, God promised Israel that He would give them a new heart. This one would not simply be the old heart circumcised; it would be a pliable heart of flesh that replaces their disobedient, calloused heart of stone. This spiritual renewal of God echoes the language of Jeremiah 31:33-34 (cf. Hebrews 8:10-12). If you need to be renewed in your heart, then obey the gospel of our Savior this morning. If you have obeyed, but find yourself in a spiritually dry time because of a lapse back into sin, then repent and confess the sin this morning.