

CHAPTER 37

The threatenings of the destruction of Judah and Jerusalem for their sins, which we had in the former part of this book, were not so terrible, but the promises of their restoration and deliverance for the glory of God, which we have here in the latter part of the book, are as comfortable; and as those were illustrated with many visions and similitudes, for the awakening of a holy fear, so are these, for the encouraging of a humble faith. God had assured them, in the foregoing chapter, that he would gather the house of Israel, even all of it, and would bring them out of their captivity, and return them to their own land; but there were two things that rendered this very unlikely: —

I. That they were so dispersed among their enemies, so destitute of all helps and advantages which might favour or further their return, and so dispirited likewise in their own minds; upon all these accounts they are here, in vision, compared to a valley full of the dry bones of dead men, which should be brought together and raised to life. The vision of this we have (v. 1-10) and the explication of it, with its application to the present case (v. 11-14).

II. That they were so divided among themselves, too much of the old enmity between Judah and Ephriam remaining even in their captivity. But, as to this, by a sign of two sticks made one in the hand of the prophet is foreshown the happy coalition that should be, at their return, between the two nations of Israel and Judah (v. 15-22). In this there was a type of the uniting of Jews and Gentiles, Jews and Samaritans, in Christ and his church. And so the prophet slides into a prediction of the kingdom of Christ, which should be set up in the world with God's tabernacle in it, and of the glories and graces of that kingdom (v. 23-28).

~~350~~ EZEKIEL 37:1-14

THE VISION OF THE DRY BONES

Here is,

I. The vision of a resurrection from death to life, and it is a glorious resurrection. This is a thing so utterly unknown to nature, and so contrary to its principles (*a privatione ad habitum non datur regressus* — *from privation to possession there is no return*), that we could have no thought of it but *by the word of the Lord*; and that it is certain by that word that there shall be a general resurrection of the dead some have urged from this vision, “For” (say they) “otherwise it would not properly be made a sign for the confirming of their faith in the promise of their deliverance out of Babylon, as the coming of the Messiah is mentioned for the confirming of their faith touching a former deliverance,” ^(~~1874~~) Isaiah 7:14. But,

1. Whether it be a confirmation or no, it is without doubt a most lively representation of a threefold resurrection, besides that which it is primarily intended to be the sign of.

(1.) The resurrection of souls from the death of sin to the life or righteousness, to a holy, heavenly, spiritual, and divine life, by the power of divine grace going along with the word of Christ, ^(~~1874~~) John 5:24, 25.

(2.) The resurrection of the gospel church, or any part of it, from an afflicted persecuted state, especially under the yoke of the New-Testament Babylon, to liberty and peace.

(3.) The resurrection of the body at the great day, especially the bodies of believers that shall rise to life eternal.

2. Let us observe the particulars of this vision.

(1.) The deplorable condition of these dead bones. The prophet was made,

[1.] to take an exact view of them. By a prophetic impulse and a divine power he was, in vision, carried out and set *in the midst of a valley*, probably that plain spoken of ^(~~1872~~) Ezekiel 3:22, where God then *talked with him*; and it was *full of bones*, of dead men's bones, not piled up on a heap, as in a charnel-house, but scattered upon the face of the ground, as if some bloody battle had been fought here, and the slain left unburied till all the flesh was devoured or putrefied, and nothing left but the bones, and those disjointed from one another and dispersed. He *passed by them round about*, and he observed not only that they were very many (for there are multitudes gone to the congregation of the dead), but that, *lo, they were very dry*, having been long exposed to the sun and wind. The bones that have been *moistened with marrow* (^(~~1872~~) Job 21:24), when they have been

any while dead, lose all their moisture, and are dry as dust. The body is now fenced with bones (³⁸¹¹Job 10:11), but then they will themselves be defenceless. The Jews in Babylon were like those dead and dry bones, unlikely ever to come together, to be so much as a skeleton, less likely to be formed into a body, and least of all to be a living body. However, they lay *unburied* in the *open valley*, which encouraged the hopes of their resurrection, as of the two witnesses, ⁶¹¹⁸Revelation 11:8, 9. The bones of Gog and Magog shall be buried (³⁵⁹²Ezekiel 39:12, 15), for their destruction is final; but the bones of Israel are in the *open valley*, under the eye of Heaven, for there is *hope in their end*.

[2.] He was made to own their case deplorable, and not to be helped by any power less than that of God himself (v. 3): “Son of man, *can these bones live*? Is it a thing likely? Cast thou devise how it should be done? Can thy philosophy reach to put life into dry bones, or thy politics to restore a captive nation?” “No,” says the prophet, “I know not how it should be done, but *thou knowest*.” He does not say, “They cannot live,” lest he should seem to limit the Holy One of Israel; but, “Lord, thou knowest whether they can and whether they shall; if thou dost not put life into them, it is certain that they cannot life.” Note, God is perfectly acquainted with his own power and his own purposes, and will have us to refer all to them, and to see and own that his wondrous works are such as could not be effected by any counsel or power but his own.

(2.) The means used for the bringing of these dispersed bones together and these dead and dry bones to life. It must be done by prophecy. Ezekiel is ordered to *prophesy upon these bones* (v. 4 and again v. 9), to *prophesy to the wind*. So he *prophesied as he was commanded*, v. 7, 10.

[1.] He must preach, and he did so; and the dead bones lived by a power that went along with the word of God which he preached.

[2.] He must pray, and he did so; and the dead bones were made to live in answer to prayer; for *a spirit of life* entered into them. See the efficacy of the word and prayer, and the necessity of both, for the raising of dead souls. God bids his ministers *prophesy upon the dry bones*. Say unto them, *Live*; yea, say unto them, *Live*; and they do as they are commanded, calling to them again and again, *O you dry bones! hear the word of the Lord*. But we call in vain, still they are dead, still they are very dry; we must therefore be earnest with God in prayer for the working of the Spirit with the word: *Come, O breath!* and breathe upon them. God's grace can

save souls without our preaching, but our preaching cannot save them without God's grace, and that grace must be sought by prayer. Note, Ministers must faithfully and diligently use the means of grace, even with those that there seems little probability of gaining upon. To prophesy upon dry bones seems as great a penance as to water a dry stick; and yet, whether they will hear or forbear, we must discharge our trust, must *prophesy as we are commanded*, in the name of him who raises the dead and is the fountain of life.

(3.) The wonderful effect of these means. Those that do as they are commanded, as they are commissioned, in the face of the greatest discouragements, need not doubt of success, for God will own and enrich his own appointments.

[1.] Ezekiel looked down and prophesied upon the bones in the valley, and they became human bodies. *First*, That which he had to *say to them* was that God would infallibly raise them to life: *Thus saith the Lord God unto these bones, You shall live*, v. 5 and again v. 6. And he that speaks the word will thereby do the work; he that says, *They shall live*, will make them alive: He will *clothe them with skin and flesh* (v. 6), as he did at first, ^{<3011>}Job 10:11. He that made us so fearfully and wonderfully, and curiously wrought us, can in like manner new-make us, for *his arm is not shortened*. *Secondly*, That which was immediately done for them was that they were moulded anew into shape. We may well suppose it was with great liveliness and vigour that the prophet prophesied, especially when he found what he said begin to take effect. Note, The opening, sealing, and applying of the promises, are the ordinary means of our participation of a new and divine nature. As Ezekiel prophesied in this vision *there was a noise*, a word of command, from heaven, seconding what he said; or it signified the motion of the angels that were to be employed as the ministers of the divine Providence in the deliverance of the Jews, and we read of the *noise of their wings* (^{<3012>}Ezekiel 1:24) and the *sound of their going*, ^{<3013>}2 Samuel 5:24. *And, behold, a shaking*, or commotion, among the bones. Even dead and dry bones begin to move when they are called to hear the word of the Lord. This was fulfilled when, upon Cyrus's proclamation of liberty, those whose spirits God had stirred up began to think of making use of that liberty, and getting ready to be gone. When *there was a noise, behold, a shaking*; when David heard *the sound of the going on the tops of the mulberry-trees* then he *bestirred himself*; then there was *a shaking*. When Paul heard the voice saying, *Why persecutest*

thou me? behold, a shaking of the dry bones; he *trembled* and was *astonished*. But this was not all: *The bones came together bone to his bone*, under a divine direction; and, though there is in man a multitude of bones, yet of all the bones of those numerous slain not one was missing, not one missed its way, not one missed its place, but, as it were by instinct, each knew and found its fellow. The dispersed bones came together and the displaced bones were knit together, the divine power supplying that to these dry bones which in a living body *every joint supplies*. Thus shall it be in the resurrection of the dead; the scattered atoms shall be ranged and marshalled in their proper place and order, and *every bone come to his bone*, by the same wisdom and power by which the bones were first *formed in the womb of her that is with child*. Thus it was in the return of the Jews; those that were scattered in several parts of the province of Babylon came to their respective families, and all as it were by consent to the general rendezvous, in order to their return. By degrees *sinews and flesh* came upon these bones, and the *skin covered them*, v. 8. This was fulfilled when the captives got their effects about them, and the *men of their place helped them with silver, and gold*, and whatever they needed for their remove, ~~1500~~ Ezra 1:4. But still there was *no breath in them*; they wanted spirit and courage for such a difficult and hazardous enterprise as this was of returning to their own land.

[2.] Ezekiel then looked up and prophesied to the *wind, or breath, or spirit*, and said, *Come, O breath! and breathe upon these slain*. As good have been still dry bones as dead bodies: but as for God *his work is perfect*; he is not the God of the dead, but of the living; therefore *breathe upon them that they may live*. In answer to this request, *the breath* immediately came *into them*, v. 10. Note, the spirit of life is from God; he at first in the creation breathed into man the breath of life, and so he will at last in the resurrection. The dispirited despairing captives were wonderfully animated with resolution to break through all the discouragements that lay in the way of their return and applied themselves to it with all imaginable vigour. And then they *stood upon their feet, an exceedingly great army*; not only living men, but effective men, fit for service in the wars and formidable to all that gave them any opposition. Note, With God nothing is impossible. He can *out of stones raise up children unto Abraham* and out of dead and dry bones levy an exceedingly great army to fight his battles and plead his cause.

II. The application of this vision to the present calamitous condition of the Jews in captivity: *These bones are the whole house of Israel*, both the ten tribes and the two. See in this what they are and what they shall be.

1. The depth of despair to which they are now reduced, v. 11. They all give up themselves for lost and gone; they say, “*Our bones are dried, our strength is exhausted, our spirits are gone, our hope is all lost; every thing we looked for succour and relief from fails us, and we are cut off for our parts.* Let who will cherish some hope, we see no ground for any.” Note, When troubles continue long, hopes have been often frustrated, and all creature-confidences fail, it is not strange if the spirits sink; and nothing but an active faith in the power, promise, and providence of God will keep them from quite dying away.

2. The height of prosperity to which, notwithstanding this, they shall be advanced: “*therefore, because things have come thus to the last extremity, prophesy to them, and tell them, now is God's time to appear for them. Jehovah-jireh — in the mount of the Lord it shall be seen, v. 12-14. Tell them,*”

(1.) “That they shall be brought out of the land of their enemies, where they are as it were buried alive: *I will open your graves.*” Those shall be restored, not only whose *bones are scattered at the grave's mouth* (^{141:7}Psalm 141:7), but who are buried in the grave; though the power of the enemy is like the *bars of the pit*, which one would think it impossible to break through, strong as death and cruel as the grave, yet it shall be conquered. God can *bring his people up from the depths of the earth,* ^{71:20}Psalm 71:20.

(2.) “That they shall be brought into their own land, where they shall live in prosperity: *I will bring you into the land of Israel* (v. 12) and *place you there* (v. 14), and will *put my spirit in you and then you shall live.*” Note, Then God puts spirit in us to good purpose, and so that we shall indeed live, when he puts his Spirit in us. And (*lastly*) in all this God will be glorified: *You shall know that I am the Lord* (v. 13), and that I have *spoken it and performed it*, v. 14. Note, God's quickening the dead redounds more than any thing to his honour, and to the honour of his word, which he has magnified above all his name, and will magnify more and more by the punctual accomplishment of every tittle of it.

~~3575~~ EZEKIEL 37:15-28

CHEERING PROMISES

Here are more exceedingly great and precious promises made of the happy state of the Jews after their return to their own land; but they have a further reference to the kingdom of the Messiah and the glories of gospel-times.

I. It is here promised that Ephraim and Judah shall be happily united in brotherly love and mutual serviceableness; so that whereas, ever since the desertion of the ten tribes from the house of David under Jeroboam, there had been continual feuds and animosities between the two kingdoms of Israel and Judah, and it is to be feared there had been some clashing between them even in the land of their captivity (Ephraim upon all occasions envying Judah and Judah vexing Ephraim), now it should be no longer, but there should be a coalition between them, and, notwithstanding the old differences that had been between them, they should agree to love one another and to do one another all good offices. This is here illustrated by a sign. The prophet was to take *two sticks*, and write upon one, *For Judah* (including Benjamin, those of the *children of Israel* that were *his companions*), upon the other, *For Joseph*, including the rest of the tribes, v. 16. These two sticks must be so framed as to fall into *one in his hand*, v. 17. The people took notice of this, and desired him to *tell them the meaning of it*, for they knew he did not play with sticks for his diversion, as children do. Those that would know the meaning should ask the meaning of the word of God which they read and hear, and of the instituted signs by which spiritual and divine things are represented to us; the ministers' *lips* should *keep the knowledge* hereof and the people should *ask it at their mouth*, ~~3411~~ Malachi 2:7. It is a necessary question for grown people, as well as children, to ask, *What mean you by this service*, by this sign? ~~4028~~ Exodus 12:26. The meaning was that Judah and Israel should become *one in the hand of God*, v. 19.

1. They shall be one, one nation, v. 22. They shall have no separate interests, and, consequently, no divided affections. There shall be no mutual jealousies and animosities, no remembrance, no remains, of their former discord. But there shall be a perfect harmony between them, a good understanding one of another, a good disposition one to another, and a readiness to all good offices and services for one another's credit and

comfort. They had been two sticks crossing and thwarting one another, nay, beating and bruising one another; but now they shall become one, supporting and strengthening one another. *Vix unita fortior* — *Force added to force is proportionally more efficient. Behold, how good and how pleasant a thing it is to see Judah and Israel, that had long been at variance, now dwelling together in unity.* Then they shall become acceptable to their God, amiable to their friends, and formidable to their enemies, ^{<2113>}Isaiah 11:13, 14.

2. They shall be one in *God's hand*; by his power they shall be united, and, being by his hand brought together, his hand shall keep them together, so that they shall not fly off, to be separated again. They shall be one in his hand, for his glory shall be the centre of their unity and his grace the cement of it. In him, in a regard to him and in his service and worship, they shall unite, and so shall become one. Both sides shall agree to put themselves into his hand, and so they shall be one. *Qui conveniunt in aliquo tertio inter se conveniunt* — *Those who agree in a third agree with each other.* Note, Those are best united that are one in God's hand, whose union with each other results from their union with Christ and their communion with God through him, ^{<4110>}Ephesians 1:10. *One in us*, ^{<6172>}John 17:21.

3. They shall be one in their return out of captivity (v. 21): *I will take them from among the heathen, and gather them on every side, and bring them together incorporated into one body to their own land.* They shall be one in their separation from the heathen with whom they had mingled themselves: they shall both agree to part from them, and take their affections off from them, and no longer to comply with their usages, and then they will soon agree to join together in walking according to the rule of God's word. Their having been joint-sufferers will contribute to this blessed comprehension, when they begin to come to themselves and to consider things. Put many pieces of metal together into the furnace, and, when they are melted, they will run all together. It was time for them to strengthen one another when their oppressors were so busy to weaken and ruin them all. Likewise their being joint-sharers in the favour of God, and the great and common deliverance wrought out for them all, should help to unite them. God's loving them all was a good reason why they should love one another. Times of common joy, as well as times of common suffering, should be healing loving times.

4. They shall all be the subjects of one king, and so they shall become one. The Jews, after their return, were under one government, and not divided as formerly. But this certainly looks further, to the kingdom of Christ; he is that one King in allegiance to whom all God's spiritual Israel shall cheerfully unite, and under whose protection they shall all be gathered. All believers unite in *one Lord, one faith, and one baptism*. And the uniting of Jews and Gentiles in the gospel church, their becoming one fold under Christ the one great Shepherd, is doubtless the union that is chiefly looked at in this prophecy. By Christ and partition-wall between them was taken down, and the enmity slain, and of them *twain* was made *one new man*, ~~404~~ Ephesians 2:14, 15.

II. It is here promised that the Jews shall by their captivity be cured of their inclination to idolatry; this shall be the happy fruit of that affliction, even the taking away of their sin (v. 23): *Neither shall they defile themselves any more with their idols*, those detestable defiling things, no, nor *with any of their former transgressions*. Note, When one sin is sincerely parted with all sin is abandoned too, for he that hates sin, as sin, will hate all sin. And those that are cured of their spiritual idolatry, their inordinate affection to the world and the flesh, that no longer make a god of their money or their belly, have a happy blow given to the root of all their transgressions. Two ways God will take to cure them of their idolatry: —

1. By bringing them out of the way of temptation to it: *“I will save them out of all their dwelling-places wherein they have sinned*, because there they met with the occasion of sin and allurements to it.” Note, It is our wisdom to avoid the places where we have been overcome by temptations to sin, not to remain in them, or return to them, but to *save ourselves* out of them, as we would out of infected places; see ~~405~~ Zechariah 2:7; ~~406~~ Revelation 18:4. And it is a great mercy when God, in his providence, *saves us out of the dwelling-places where we have sinned*, and keeps us from harm by keeping us out of harm's way, in answer to our prayer, *Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil*.

2. By changing the disposition of their mind: *“I will cleanse them* (v. 28); that is, I will sanctify them, will work in them an aversion to the pollutions of sin and a complacency in the pleasures of holiness, and then you may be sure they will not defile themselves any more with their idols.” Those whom God has cleansed he will keep clean.

III. It is here promised that they shall be the people of God, as *their God*, and the subjects and sheep of Christ their King and Shepherd. These promises we had before, and they are here repeated (v. 23, 24) for the encouragement of the faith of Israel: *They shall be my people*, to serve me, and *I will be their God*, to save them and to make them happy. *David, my servant, shall be king over them*, to fight their battles, to protect them from injury, and to rule them, and overrule all things that concern them for their good. He shall be *their shepherd*, to guide them and provide for them. Christ is this David, Israel's King of old; and those whom he subdues to himself, and makes willing in the day of his power, he makes to *walk in his judgments and to keep his statutes*.

IV. It is here promised that they shall dwell comfortably, v. 25, 26. They shall dwell in the land of Israel; for where else should Israelites dwell? And many things will concur to make their dwelling agreeable.

1. They shall have it by covenant; they shall come in again upon their old title, by virtue of the grant made unto *Jacob, God's servant*. As Christ was David, God's servant, so the church is Jacob, his servant too; and the members of the church shall come in for a share, as born in God's house. He will make a *covenant of peace* with them (v. 26), and in pursuance of that covenant he will *place them, and multiply them*. Note, Temporal mercies are doubly sweet when they come from the promise of the covenant, and not merely from common providence.

2. They shall come to it by prescription: "It is *the land wherein your fathers have dwelt*, and for that reason you cannot but have a special kindness for it, which God will graciously gratify." It was the inheritance of their ancestors, and therefore shall be theirs. They are *beloved for their fathers' sakes*.

3. They shall have it entailed upon them and the heirs of their body, and shall have their families built up, so that it shall not be lost for want of heirs. *They shall dwell therein* all their time, and never be turned out of possession, and they shall leave it for an inheritance *to their children and their children's children for ever*, who shall enjoy it when they are gone, the prospect of which will be a satisfaction to them.

4. They shall live under a good government, which will contribute very much to the comfort of their lives: *My servant David shall be their prince for ever*. This can be no other than Christ, of whom it was said, when he

was brought into the world, *He shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever*, ⁴¹³Luke 1:33. Note, It is the unspeakable comfort of all Christ's faithful subjects that, as his *kingdom* is *everlasting*, so he is an *everlasting King*, he lives to reign for ever; and, as sure and as long as he lives and reigns, they shall live and reign also.

5. The charter by which they hold all their privileges is indefeasible. God's covenant with them shall be an *everlasting covenant*; so the covenant of grace is, for it secures to us an everlasting happiness.

V. It is here promised that God will dwell among them; and this will make them dwell comfortably indeed: *I will set my sanctuary in the midst of them for evermore; my tabernacle also shall be with them*, v. 26, 27.

1. They shall have the tokens of God's special presence with them and his gracious residence among them. God will *in very deed dwell with them upon the earth*, for where his sanctuary is he is; when they profaned his sanctuary he took it from them (²⁶⁴Isaiah 64:11), but now that they are purified God will dwell with them again.

2. They shall have opportunity of conversing with God, of hearing from him, speaking to him, and so keeping up communion with him, which will be the comfort of their lives.

3. They shall have the means of grace. By the oracles of God in his tabernacle they shall be made wiser and better, and all their children shall be taught of the Lord.

4. Thus their covenant relation to God shall be improved and the bond of it strengthened: *"I will be their God and they shall be my people, and they shall know it by having my sanctuary among them, and shall have the comfort of it."*

VI. Both God and Israel shall have the honour of this among the heathen, v. 26. "Now the heathen observe how Israel have profaned their own crown by their sins, and God has profaned it by his judgments; but then, when Israel is reformed and God has returned in mercy to them, the very heathen shall be made to know that *the Lord sanctifies* Israel, has a title to them and an interest in them more than other people, because his sanctuary is, and shall be, in the midst of them." Note, God designs the sanctification of those among whom he sets up his sanctuary. And blessed and holy are those who, enjoying the privileges of the sanctuary, give such proofs and

evidences of their sanctification that the heathen may know it is no less than the almighty grace of God that sanctifies them. Such have God's sanctuary in the midst of them, the kingdom of God within them, in the principles of the spiritual life, and shall have it so for evermore in the enjoyments of an eternal life.