

Focus on Ezekiel 37:1–14

WHAT is important to know?

—From “Exegetical Perspective” by Stephen Breck Reid

The final section (vv. 11–14) contains the interpretative summary. The bones are the “whole house of Israel.” The phrase occurs in the Old Testament some twelve times, with half of the occurrences in the book of Ezekiel (Ezek. 3:7; 5:4; 20:40; 36:10; 39:25; see also Exod. 40:38; Lev. 10:6; Num. 20:29; 1 Sam. 7:2, 3; Jer. 13:11). This marks a return to the pan-Israelite sense of identity after the fall of Samaria (722 BCE) and especially after the fall of Jerusalem (587 BCE). God broke into the cemetery of the dead pan-Israelite community to inspire, bringing the Spirit in order to prompt a new life.

WHERE is God in these words?

—From “Theological Perspective” by Kelton Cobb

While there are additional, and equally biblical, ways to understand the story of salvation—for example, vanquishing the forces of evil or being cleansed of sin and filled with divine purpose—this plot of exile and return is part of the deep structure of the Bible. According to it, we are separated from God and are seeking a way to return, though we may not know it. This is Augustine’s confession of the restless heart that will find rest only when it returns to God. It is certainly the unrequited longing that is expressed in Ezekiel’s vision of the valley of dry bones.

SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

—From “Pastoral Perspective” by Katherine E. Amos

What would an analysis of our spiritual bones indicate this Lenten season? What would we find out about our spiritual maturity if we examined our spiritual bones? Would we show a deficiency of a substantial diet of study, reflection, prayer, and a meaningful relationship with God? What would this examination tell us about the richness of our spiritual practices? How sincerely do we long and pray for the gifts of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control? What would be our answer if the Lord spoke directly to us and questioned, “Can these bones live?”

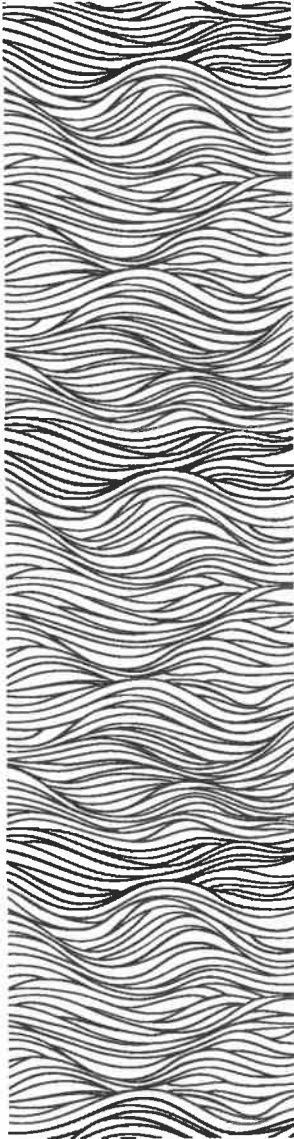
NOW WHAT is God’s word calling us to do?

—From “Homiletical Perspective” by James A. Wallace

This breath is the spirit of God, the life-giving *ruach* God breathed into the first human creature in the garden. This breath moves forth in the Lazarus story. This same breath was breathed into Jesus crucified, lifting him up to resurrection life, and touched us when the Spirit came upon us in baptism. This breath moves through the world, raising people into new life when all the odds are against it. We need to hear the vision of Ezekiel in the valley of dry bones. It is a scene meant to live in the imagination and the heart, when we find ourselves gasping for breath, struggling to stay alive.

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Can These Bones Live?

Ezekiel, Man of Visions



The first three verses of the book of Ezekiel tell us that Ezekiel had his first prophetic vision while living among the exiles by the river Chebar in Babylon. The exiles were people from Judah, the southern kingdom of Israel, who had been forced to leave their homeland in 597 BCE. Their king, Jehoachin, was also taken with the hostages from Judah to Babylon. Jehoachin was in his fifth year as king when Ezekiel had his first vision in July of 593 BCE. Meanwhile, back in Judah, Zedekiah, a puppet king whom the Babylonians had installed in Jerusalem, led a rebellion, which the Babylonian army eventually crushed. In the summer of 587 BCE, the Babylonians tore down the walls of Jerusalem and burned and robbed the temple there. More Israelites were taken to Babylonia.

In one disturbing vision, Ezekiel describes the impending final destruction of the temple in Jerusalem, in which he sees God's very presence leave the temple (Ezekiel 10). God's glory abandons the temple because of the idolatry and injustice being practiced by some of Judah's leaders. These sins against God and more led to God's judgment against Judah and are the reason they and Ezekiel are now suffering in exile. But Ezekiel's visions are not all doom and gloom. He also brings a message of hope. The people will rise from their exile "grave" and return home (37:12). This later occurred when Cyrus of Persia defeated the Babylonians in 539 BCE and allowed the people of Judah to begin returning home, ending the exile officially in 538 BCE.

Ezekiel's final vision is of a restored worship in a new temple in Jerusalem (chapters 40–48). From that temple Ezekiel envisioned a river of life-giving water flowing out to nourish the land (Ezekiel 47:1–12). This river sounds a great deal like the vision in the book of Revelation that describes the river of the water of life flowing from the throne of God (Revelation 22:1–5).