

Ezekiel Ch 37 • “Can These Bones Live?”

Background Ch 37 continues a new section in the book of Ezekiel (Ch 33–39) in which God speaks words of hope and restoration to His people. After Ch 39, the remaining chapters of Ezekiel focus on the Millennial Kingdom. The emphasis of Ch 37 is the regathering of Israel in UNbelief prior to the ultimate regathering in belief following Christ's Second Coming. The fulfillment of the prophecies of Ch 37 with the re-establishment of the nation Israel in 1948 forced much of the church to re-evaluate its understanding of God's future plans for Israel!

- v1 The language here cues us this is a vision not an actual physical transport to another location (cf 1 & 2 Kings; Isaiah; and Jeremiah).
- v2 The vision MAY have been of a real place but doesn't NEED to be. Note: God DOES speak in figurative language — we just need to let Him tell us when He is. We can't arbitrarily decide something is figurative without textual cues.
- v3 The best answer anyone could give: with God anything is possible!
- v4-6 Ezekiel by faith speaks what God tells him to speak.
- v7-11a Some scholars believe this is a description of a physical resurrection. Unfortunately text doesn't justify that interpretation. Can't be partial resurrection because v11 says otherwise. Can't be resurrection of all of Israel because Rev 20 and elsewhere clarifies resurrection of righteous and unrighteous are separate events. Not to mention that the bones speak while they are still bones — that alone clinches the fact this is symbolic not literal.
- v11b God TELLS us point-blank to read this symbolically — the dry bones represent the hopelessness of Israel (hope is dead). Big picture this speaks to Israel's loss of hope in a coming, redeeming Messiah.
- v12-14 Note God's love for Israel is undiminished. Plans for future and hope. But God's plans roll out in phases — Israel will be regathered in unbelief BEFORE her spiritual re-birth. Spiritual re-birth can't happen until Israel confesses her national sin (Matt 23:37-39; Matt 24:31).
- Note the resonance with v5-6 — sinew, flesh, skin. Bodies are reanimated but not truly alive. The life only enters after the bodies are formed (which parallels Genesis account of creation).

Brief history of Israel's regathering ☒

Diaspora begins in 70AD; continues until 1871 when handful of Jews return. By 1881 there were approximately 25k in the land. In 1887 the first Zionist congress was convened with the stated goal of reclaiming a Jewish homeland. By 1914 there were c. 80k Jews in the land. Balfour Declaration (1917) announces Britain's formal support for a Jewish homeland, but little happened by way of follow-through due to Arab resistance. Still was an encouragement to Jews worldwide — by 1939 c. 450k Jews were living in their ancestral homeland. Following WWII the UK ceded control of 5000 square miles to Israeli rule; on May 14, 1948 the modern state of Israel was born — literally from a field of dry bones. Initially home to 650k Jews, by 2002 nearly 5M called Israel home (more than 1/3 of the est'd 13M Jews in the world). Today that number is nearly half of world's Jewish population: 7.4M out of est'd 15.8M worldwide.

*Today there is a sign in Ben Gurion airport quoting (in Hebrew) Jeremiah 31:17 ☒
"There is hope for your future; your children shall return to their own land."
The bittersweet part of that is that Israel believes they are seeing the fulfillment of that prophecy in our day. In reality, that's a prophecy of Israel being regathered in faith after the return of Jesus!*

And there will BE a second re-gathering! We're not just relying on Ezekiel 37 to draw that conclusion: cf Jer 23:3-5; Is 11:11-12; Zeph 2:1-2

v15 "Again the word of the Lord came to me..." starts a new section.
Sequel to v1-14 but also distinct. Tune in next week ☺

APPLICATION **What do we do with tonight? What does it mean to us?**

- (1) We say "wow" — fulfilled prophecy in our lifetime! Can trust the Bible!
- (2) We say "wow" — there is no guilt or shame beyond blood of Jesus!
- (3) We say "wow" — I really don't want to be gathered in unbelief!