

+ THE LOOKOUT

SEPTEMBER 2022

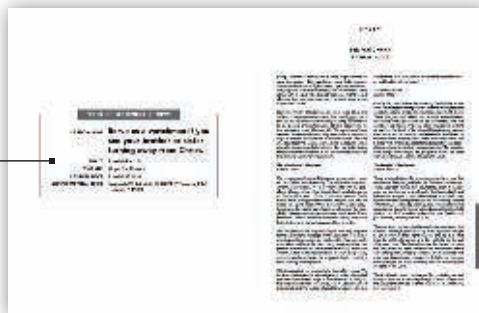
Unit: Ezekiel (Part 2)

Theme: Hope for Sinners

Overview: A Bible school class named themselves the HOPE Class. The acronym stood for "Hitched Or Patiently Engaged." But that is not what *hope* stands for or means. *Hope* is the eager and very real anticipation of a world totally controlled by God. The major prophet Ezekiel marked out the consequences of sin (we focused on that last month), but he also marked out hope for sinners. This month students will learn of the tender care necessary to turn a sinner back to God, how having a new heart helps with that task, how people who have experienced the deadly nature of sin can breathe with new life, and how God's nature can come afresh to once-weary sinners.

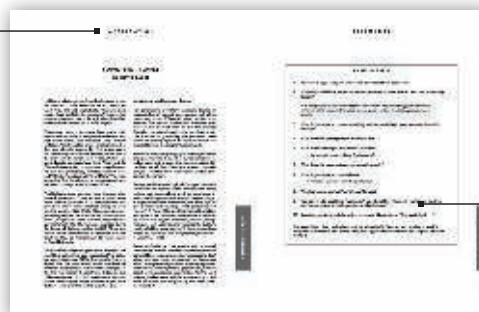
HOW TO USE

Each week has a **lesson aim**, **lesson text**, and **supplemental text**.



Tabs indicate the week of each lesson.

Each week features three sections: **Study**, **Application**, and **Discovery**.



Use the **Discovery** questions to study, discuss, and apply the Scripture passages in a group or class.

WEEK OF SEPTEMBER 18, 2022

LESSON AIM: **Ask God to breathe
new life for his glory
into you, your family,
and your church.**

UNIT: Ezekiel (Part 2)

THEME: Hope for Sinners

LESSON TEXT: Ezekiel 37:1-14

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: Genesis 2:7; 1 Corinthians 15:42-44, 52-54

STUDY

DRY BONES

BY MARK SCOTT

Ancient philosophers—such as Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle—who probed the elements of the universe (e.g., fire, water, and wind) may have actually found their way to God (Acts 17:27; Jeremiah 29:13). The Bible likens these basic elements to God himself. God is a consuming fire (Hebrews 12:29). The Holy Spirit in us is like water (John 7:38-39). And Jesus told the woman at the well that God was Spirit (“breath,” John 4:24).

Every scientist knows that water is necessary for life—but so is breath. In the beginning God breathed into man (i.e., blew with his Spirit), and man became a living being (Genesis 2:7). For true abundant life (John 10:10) people need the breath of God. That is especially true if your life situation has stolen all the breath out of you. The Israelites living in exile in Babylon felt breathless. The wind had been knocked out of them. Could God make them breathe again?

The Valley

Ezekiel 37:1-3

God had promised Israel a new heart (last week’s lesson). Now the Israelites would need a new Spirit. The vision of the valley of dry bones that Ezekiel was given pictured this new life and restoration of Israel to their homeland. The setting of this vision was a *valley* (plain—like the plains in Babylon). The year of the vision was sometime after 586 BC.

That it was a vision from God is not in question. The phrases *the hand of the Lord* and *brought me out by the Spirit* ensure that this was a vision. Ezekiel noticed that this valley was filled with bones (the result of a battle?). This would indicate death, decomposition, and lack of burial. God gave Ezekiel a tour of this valley. Ezekiel noticed that the bones were *very dry*. They had been exposed long enough to be bleached and baked by the sun. God engaged the prophet by asking him, “*Can these bones live?*” Ezekiel “pleaded the Fifth.” Only Adonai Yahweh knew.

The Bones

Ezekiel 37:4-8

After Ezekiel toured the valley, God called him to *prophesy to these bones*. He was not told to organize the bones, hold a seminar for the bones, or even equip the

bones. He was told to give God’s inspired message to the bones. He was commanded to speak to these seemingly inanimate objects. (Previously God had asked Ezekiel to speak to the mountains [6:2; 36:1] and forests [20:47].) God would use Ezekiel’s preaching to bring breath into the bones. The Hebrew word for wind, breath, or Spirit is *ruach* (pronounced “ROO-akh”). It is a word that originally meant something pulsating like a lung.

God promised Ezekiel that if he prophesied to these bones they would come to life (a symbol of God restoring life to the beaten-down exiles). Tendons and flesh/skin would attach themselves to these bones. This would indicate God’s restorative hand exercised on Israel. When Ezekiel obeyed this command, he heard a *rattling* (earthquake or rushing). Bones, tendons, and flesh came together to form human beings again.

The Breath

Ezekiel 37:9-10

A body needs breath to exist. Ezekiel’s second task was to prophesy to the breath so it would enter these bodies. The war that had taken place in the valley sucked the breath out of the soldiers. So, God’s breath was brought *from the four winds* (a symbol referring to his complete process of bringing life to these dead bodies—as in the expression “the four corners of the earth”). Once the bodies had breath, they *stood up on their feet*.

The People

Ezekiel 37:11-14

This vision of the valley of dry bones referred to *the people* (house or family) of Israel. Captivity had taken the life taken out of them. They felt *dried up*, as if their *hope* were *gone*. They felt *cut off* (an expression in the Old Testament that meant rejected or excommunicated).

But Ezekiel gave the people hope by using a second metaphor. Not only did God have the power to resurrect bodies, he could also open graves. So, the metaphor of a cemetery is enjoined. While this could refer to some kind of “end-time” resurrection of the nation of Israel, it more likely was used metaphorically for God bringing Israel back to their homeland. If they get home, they would know that God did it. Death Valley and cemeteries are no problem for the God of creation. ■

CAN THESE BONES LIVE?

BY DAVID FAUST

Have you ever been in a situation where everything looked hopeless and you felt overwhelmed?

During a mission trip to Romania last spring, I visited Ukrainian refugees who had fled from their war-torn country. As a group of refugees gathered to meet our American team, our translator Sergei told me, “75 percent of the people at this camp are not believers in God. Please tell them the gospel.”

I gazed at my weary listeners—mothers with young children, a scared-looking teenage boy, and some tired-looking old men and women with despair on their faces. How could I possibly help them? My normal sermon preparation steps didn’t apply in that moment. Using John 3:16 as my text, I told them about God’s love and assured them that Christians throughout the world were praying for them.

Later that week, our mission team visited a transition center where we met a group of parentless teens who had recently come off the street. Eventually they would be placed in an orphanage or a foster home, but for now these Romanian teenagers sat on a bench staring at me. One girl sat alone with her head down. Before entering the room, we were instructed, “Don’t hug them. They have lice.” We brought candy bars to share, but a few bites of chocolate wouldn’t solve the grim problems these young people faced.

The translator asked me to speak. Again, I didn’t have a well-prepared message to deliver, but I prayed for God’s help and told them, “This is my first time to visit your country. Driving across Romania, I noticed a large field filled with sheep.” I shared Jesus’ story about a shepherd who had 100 sheep, and when one was lost, the shepherd searched and found it, then joyfully carried it home on his shoulders. “Think of the heavenly Father as your good shepherd,” I encouraged the teens. We prayed for them and handed out candy before we left. I gave the girl who sat alone two candy bars. She managed a smile of thanks and then walked over and hugged my wife.

Dry Bones

God confronted Ezekiel with a desperate-looking situation—a ghastly Death Valley filled with skeletal remains.

Bones filled the valley, and they were *dry bones*, indicating the bodies had been dead a long time.

When the Lord asked, “Can these bones live?” the prophet gave an honest answer: “Sovereign Lord, you alone know” (Ezekiel 37:3). Some situations are so desperate and complicated, only God himself can resolve them. The people of Israel said, “Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone,” but God promised, “I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them” (vv. 11-12). What looks impossible to us is possible for the Creator of life.

Could spiritually dead Israel ever be restored? God said, “Prophecy to these bones” (v. 4), and after Ezekiel preached, God transformed the bones into a living army filled with his Spirit.

My Bones

What did our little group of American visitors accomplish in Romania? Our short visit couldn’t fix all the problems. When we left, those Ukrainian refugees and lonely teens still faced an uncertain future. Did we plant any seeds of hope in their hearts? Only God knows.

But this I know: Over time, God can bring new life to desperate souls. A young man who picked us up at the airport in Romania was abandoned in a train station when he was 4 years old, but thanks to caring Christians, he grew up in a big family and now he’s a capable 23-year-old studying at a local university. We met a young woman who was sex trafficked at age 7. Only the Lord knows the full extent of her trauma. But her adoptive family gave her a chance, and now she is a confident looking 19-year-old with hope for the future.

By God’s grace, even in desperate situations, people can be reborn and life can be restored. Someday I will trade my own dry bones for a new resurrection body. I don’t know exactly how this will happen, but God knows! That’s why there is still hope for Ukraine and Romania—and anywhere else in the world where human hearts receive the life-giving breath of God.

Personal Challenge: Where do you see death and despair in the world? Pray that God will restore life and hope in the ways that only he can do. ■

DISCOVERY

BY MICHAEL C. MACK

1. With whom over the last week did you share the good news that God “will save you from all your uncleanness”?
2. When have you faced what appeared to be a hopeless circumstance? What happened?

Ask two people to read aloud **Ezekiel 37:1-14** one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to retell the passage as creatively and picturesquely as possible (in three minutes or less).

3. What methods did God use to teach Ezekiel about God’s restorative power?
4. Looking at the entire passage (including vv. 11-14), what does the valley of dry bones and their reanimation represent . . . for Israel? For God’s church today?
5. What did Ezekiel learn about God?
 - What do *you* learn about God from this passage?
6. What does this passage teach you about yourself?
7. What significance is there to God breaking the reanimation process into two stages (restoration of flesh and breath)?
8. Look again at God’s question and Ezekiel’s response in verse 3. In his “Application” for this study, David Faust said, “Some situations are so desperate and complicated, only God himself can resolve them.” What does this teach you about ministering to others?
9. God gave Ezekiel a seemingly ridiculous, impossible task, yet Ezekiel obeyed. What does this teach you about obeying God?
10. How will you team with God this week to “preach” to “dry bones” (those who are spiritually dead) with the aim of seeing God bring new life to them?
11. Based on our study and discussion, complete this sentence: “This week, I will . . .”

For Next Week: Read and reflect on **Ezekiel 43:1-12**. You can also read next week’s supplemental texts as well as the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study. ■