

Ezek. 37:1-14, 24-28
The New Covenant
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Lynchburg, Virginia

EXHORDIUM

We have now made our way up to the New Covenant. Advent and Christmas is a perfect time to be exploring God's promises to us in Jesus Christ. Today, we look at Ezekiel but we will also be looking at the prophet Jeremiah and his glorious promises to us in chapter 31:31-34 where God promises to make a New Covenant with Israel.

Both of these prophets lived at a time immediately preceding the destruction of Jerusalem. Ezekiel was in Babylon, having been taken in the first captivity, and Jeremiah prophesied from Jerusalem at an earlier time. They both lived prior to the fall of Jerusalem and for some time after the fall.

This is significant because of the nature of their prophecies. There is a great deal of doom dished out by them. Israel is in a terrible state. We last looked at the Covenant of David and how God established His people with a great number of descendants, gave them a land and then gave them a Shepard King. But that kingdom begins to fall apart as soon as Solomon's son takes the helm.

We move down stream about 400 years and things have gotten really bad. The kingdom was divided in two. The northern kingdom had its capitol in Samaria. They were a nation of idolaters, serving Yahveh through the calves that were set up; this reckons back to the rebellion under Aaron when Moses was on the mountain. The northern kingdom was destroyed in 722 B.C. and the southern kingdom survived for a time until its capitol, Jerusalem, was besieged and destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar in 586 B.C.

This is all very significant as we think back about what we have studied thus far in relation to the Covenant. God had made promises to Israel. These promises initially were related to offspring. God would supply sons to Abraham for generations. The children of Abraham would be like the stars in the sky or the sands of the sea. Furthermore, God promised that the sons of Abraham would one day possess the land of promise.

It takes a great deal of time for these promises to come to fruition, about 1000 years from Abraham to David. In David, all of God's promises seem to be filled up and God promises David that his sons will always sit on the throne of Yahveh.

But then, through apostasy and idolatry, the people of God begin to turn away from the Lord. The kingdom is divided. Enemies invade and they begin to lose the land. When Samaria is destroyed, a large deportation occurs and many non-Jews are brought in to fill up the land. This is one reason that the Jews in Jesus's day so despised Samaria. They had split off from Judah but they were also first conquered, deported and the land polluted with unbelievers. By the remnant in Jerusalem, they were considered less than Jews. This fact is also significant as we see the two kingdoms reunited in Christ. This reunification of the ancient kingdoms is also a foreshadowing of the gospel going out to the Gentiles.

Eventually, the southern kingdom is invaded. In 597 B.C., many Jews are carted off to Babylon, among them the prophet Ezekiel. Ten years later, Jerusalem is destroyed and most of its remaining inhabitants are deported to Babylon.

After these wars, the people of God were completely defeated. The promises of God were altogether lost. They were defeated, destroyed, destitute and dead. In this place of utter devastation, God speaks to them about living bones. The famous prophecy in Jeremiah also speaks of the valley of bones.

We are to see that the people of God were dead, there was no hope of life, the promises were gone. Can you imagine the despair of God's people in such a situation? We know from Scripture that God always left a faithful remnant in Israel. As the captives are carted off to Babylon, there are faithful ones in the captivity. Ezekiel is there. Daniel and his friends end up there. Can you imagine what they are thinking? How much faith did they have to speak about and hold onto the promises of God? They had no earthly hope to go on. They were in a foreign land, serving a foreign and pagan kingdom and their homeland was a wasteland of destruction.

We cannot imagine the promises being any more dead. But that is God's way. He wants us to understand how He does things. These things happened for us so that we can understand that God does not act according

to earthly wisdom. Or, for that matter, according to science. What He does, does not measure up to our standard or fit into the scientific method.

It is clear. We can see it. But we cannot believe our eyes. What we see with our eyes defies what we think we know to be the truth. This is why we have to take God at His Word and believe what He says He will do and also what He has already done.

What am I talking about? Resurrection! Not only is God's fulfillment of establishing His Kingdom in a glorious foreshadowed here but also the Resurrection of Christ and His people. God's people had died, God's promises had died, God's King had been captured and enslaved. The people of God were completely at the mercy of their enemies. There was virtually nothing that they could do to resist the powers upon them. In this place, there only hope was to believe that God's promises had not all passed away.

They had to hope that God was going to do something more in the future. Thus, the promises from Jeremiah and Ezekiel.

Keep in mind that from Abraham to David was about 1000 years and from David to Jesus is about another 1000 years. So, we should not get impatient when waiting upon God. For God, a thousand years is as a day. He is doing something much grander than we can see on a day to day basis or even in the scope of a generation or two.

His design in the ancient world was to exalt His kingdom over all the Earth. This is true even from the days of Abraham. But He would not do this without His great King Jesus on the throne. The earthly kingdoms failed utterly and died out completely. But the one who has already defeated death by being resurrected from the dead will remain on His throne until all of God's promises are realized. Thus, we have a better covenant with greater promises.

EXEGESIS

Ezek 37:1-14 37 The hand of the Lord was upon me, and carried me out in the spirit of the Lord, and set me down in the midst of the valley which was full of bones, 2 And caused me to pass by them round about: and, behold, there were very many in the open valley; and, lo, they were very dry.

Imagine a great war in which many people are cast into a valley of death. In the modern era, the grizzly nature of mass graves have been revealed. People piled up and rotting until the bones grow old and dry. Not only are the people dead but they are non-distinct. They are piled up. Their headstones never existed or are lost. No one knows who these people are. Those of you who have seen bones in the wild also know that such bones do not stay intact. The bones are scattered as the little creatures of the wilds devour them. Arm is separated from body. A skull here, a thigh bone there.

3 And he said unto me, Son of man, can these bones live? And I answered, O Lord God, thou knowest.

God asks a rhetorical question to which the obvious answer is no. But Ezekiel wisely refuses to answer, waiting to see what God's intentions were. Perhaps He would grind the bones to dust and scatter them to the four winds. Maybe the bones should be utterly burnt in absolute annihilation. Ezekiel knows that they deserve such a judgment. But he is unsure of what God will do with them.

4 Again he said unto me, Prophecy upon these bones, and say unto them, O ye dry bones, hear the word of the Lord.

God tells Ezekiel to speak to the bones. Why would a man of God speak to a dead man? Perhaps a mostly dead man could hear the Word of God? We might have hope that a Word from a man of God might call a soul back into a body recently departed. But after three days, it makes no sense to speak to a dead man. But God wants us to speak to dead men, even old dried up bones.

Is that not the role of preacher? Why would we speak to old dry bones? Well, to bring them to life, of course! If they are not dead, then our words might revive them. But if they are dead, we know that only God can bring life. Thus, they must be dead when we speak to them so that we know that the life that they live is from the Word of God.

5 Thus saith the Lord God unto these bones; Behold, I will cause breath to enter into you, and ye shall live: 6 And I will lay sinews upon

you, and will bring up flesh upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and ye shall live; and ye shall know that I am the Lord.

God is the giver of life. Just as He formed Adam and breathed the breath of life into him, so He gathers that which is dead and scattered and breathes into them life anew. When God gives life to dead bones, men live and they know that He is God, the Savior.

7 So I prophesied as I was commanded: and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and behold a shaking, and the bones came together, bone to his bone. 8 And when I beheld, lo, the sinews and the flesh came up upon them, and the skin covered them above: but there was no breath in them.

This is a beautiful and frightening picture. Imagine speaking to a scattered skeleton and then watching as the scattered dry bones rattle together. Then the flesh begins to grow and it has the look of a living man but without the breath of God. Maybe it looks like a wax figure still.

9 Then said he unto me, Prophecy unto the wind, prophecy, son of man, and say to the wind, Thus saith the Lord God; Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live.

It takes the wind of God, His Spirit, to bring life into a man. The four winds represent God's Holy Spirit. The slain are killed by the enemies of God. Death and sin are the great enemies. But God also uses earthly enemies to chastise His people.

10 So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood up upon their feet, an exceeding great army.

When the man of God speaks, there is life. The people of God stand by the breath and word of God. They are a great army used to defeat every foe by the power of God.

11 Then he said unto me, Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel: behold, they say, Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost: we are cut off for our parts. 12 Therefore prophecy and say unto

them, Thus saith the Lord God; Behold, O my people, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel. 13 And ye shall know that I am the Lord, when I have opened your graves, O my people, and brought you up out of your graves. 14 And shall put my spirit in you, and ye shall live, and I shall place you in your own land: then shall ye know that I the Lord have spoken it, and performed it, saith the Lord.

All hope is lost without the Resurrecting power of God. God opens graves and makes the dead to walk about. Recall the reports from Jerusalem at the Resurrection of Jesus. Many were resuscitated to life. This was a fulfillment of this prophecy.

Ezek 37:24-28 24 And David my servant shall be king over them; and they all shall have one shepherd: they shall also walk in my judgments, and observe my statutes, and do them. 25 And they shall dwell in the land that I have given unto Jacob my servant, wherein your fathers have dwelt; and they shall dwell therein, even they, and their children, and their children's children for ever: and my servant David shall be their prince for ever.

Here is that promise to David. By the time of Ezekiel, the Davidic kingdom is coming to a resounding end. The Davidic line of kings is destroyed and they become vassals to foreign invaders. So what is Ezekiel talking about? The promised seed, the Messiah who will sit on David's royal throne forever.

We have to understand the land and people in a new way. This is most especially true after 70 A.D., when the temple, temple worship and sacrifices are completely destroyed, never to arise again. There is no need for sacrifice, so God gave them one generation to repent and turn to Jesus before He destroyed the Temple made with hands.

EXHORTATION

26 Moreover I will make a covenant of peace with them; it shall be an everlasting covenant with them: and I will place them, and multiply them, and will set my sanctuary in the midst of them for evermore. 27 My tabernacle also shall be with them: yea, I will be their

God, and they shall be my people. 28 And the heathen shall know that I the Lord do sanctify Israel, when my sanctuary shall be in the midst of them for evermore.

These promises are on a large scale. They are bigger than any one individual. To some of you that may be discouraging. You may say, “Well, that’s great, God is going to fill the earth with Christians and Jesus will reign over His people but what about me? What about my suffering? My sins? My hope?”

And this is part of the glory of the New Covenant, as well. Remember, it is a better covenant based upon better promises. The Holy Spirit has been poured out upon God’s people in a new and glorious way. While the grand scheme of God is bigger than any one individual, the presence of God with His people, intimately includes EVERY individual. God is not merely with His people, traveling with them in the tabernacle, or residing at the temple. The veil of the inner sanctuary has been torn. God’s people have become priests. Every man, woman and child can now enter into the holy of holies and bask in the Shekinah glory of God, revealed in the person of Jesus Christ and displayed to us in the Holy Spirit.

We can know God, from the least of us, little children, even to the greatest of us, the old, wise and powerful. God’s promises to us in Christ are the full presence of God for all of His people. I am not sure we have grasped this truth to us, yet. But we need to do so and we need to enter in.

That is what our service is all about. This is what Covenant Renewal is. We have come to worship God but it is more than that. God has called us out of the tomb. We were like Lazarus, dead four days until we hear the voice of Jesus. We are like the dead bodies, long forgotten and dried up bones. Without God making us alive, we are utterly and completely dead, without God and without hope in the world. But God has put flesh on our bones, His Spirit in our hearts and He draws to Himself so that we cry Abba, our Dear Father.

Do you understand this? Do you think Lazarus was thankful to Jesus? Do you think He loved Jesus? Whenever he was tempted to be unfaithful to Jesus, all he had to do was to remember that he was once dead and now he is

alive. How could such a man, whose very breath was given him by the Lord, fail to faithfully serve His Christ?