



◇ **THE VALLEY OF DRY BONES**

- ◆ Ezekiel Preaches to the Bones (37:1-14)
- ◆ The Two Sticks (37:15-28)

◇ **INVASION BY GOG**

- ◆ Amassing Large Armies (38:1-9)
- ◆ Plotting and Planning (38:10-16)
- ◆ God's Fury (38:17-23)

◇ **JUDGMENT ON GOG**

- ◆ Certain Doom (39:1-8)
- ◆ Cleansing the Land and Burying the Dead (39:9-20)
- ◆ Promise to the Penitent (39:21-29)

JEFFERSONVILLE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Fall/Winter 2016-2017 Adult Bible Study

Ezekiel

By Elder Betsi Moise



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EZEKIEL: GOD IS STRONG

What makes Ezekiel such a compelling leader is that in the midst of exile before a depressing valley, he finds both the faith and the courage to obediently and faithfully do as God has commanded.

His call does not make sense. It is a valley of dry bones. There is nothing hopeful about where he is standing - especially if Ezekiel believes that it's his job to bring life to the bones. Instead Ezekiel is somehow able to accept that God's plan for that valley of dry bones is far bigger than his human ability to understand or even imagine it.

If it were simply up to Ezekiel, those bones might still be dry and dead today. But it was never about Ezekiel. It was and continues to be about God.

It is clear to me that we are an exilic people. We live at a time when the values of the culture often collide with the values of our faith. But I've come to believe that the church was always meant to be made up of an exilic people.

That is the role of the church - to prophesy; to proclaim resurrection hope against human despair; to model an alternative "God life". The church was never envisioned to be a place of status quo and cultural norms and comfort. We are to be a counter-cultural presence of hope.

As we think about a new season of ministry for our congregations; as we pray about denominational challenges and the desolation of the world around us, I remind us of what happens when Ezekiel is led to this valley of dry bones by the hand of God.

It's pretty amazing. Listen carefully – could that be a wind blowing upon us? I think I hear some rattling. May our ministries be rich with the transformation of God's powerful and Holy Breath.



I believe we have allowed the despair of the world around us to shape a kind of despair within. And friends, that is easy to do – as we consider the sounds of unrest and injustice surrounding us – racism cloaked in new ways, unbridled violence, immigration, Middle East challenges, Ukraine, ISIS, and so much more.

Instead I've come to believe that we are generally not bold about proclaiming God's Word with a sense of belief and conviction. We tend to be shy about inviting friends to join us. We are even more reticent about asking our own members to 'step up' to new levels of discipleship and commitment. I'm not saying we are called to stand up on soapboxes - that's not my idea of evangelism. I am simply saying that if we believe we have something worth saying, we need to do so with a combination of boldness and grace.

That boldness and grace needs to be observable by others in our daily witness – by those outside the comfort of our churches. I often cringe when I think about what the outside world sees in and through us - the people of the church.

Notwithstanding these reflections, I believe we are at the cusp of an exciting new chapter for the church – in the greater Philadelphia area and beyond. At a time in history when people of all ages are desperately seeking authenticity and spirituality, we, ambassadors of the Church of Jesus Christ, have a unique opportunity to proclaim the good news in refreshing ways.

We have the opportunity to creatively think about the relevance of our presence in the world. But that means we need to be focused on our “Gospel” mission in the world. We need to be focused on equipping our leadership and the next generation. We need to find ways to partner with one another – across congregations and ministries. We need to explore ways to speak for those who cannot speak for themselves. And we need to be doing these things while simultaneously struggling with the challenges within.

We can choose to blame Louisville, the presbytery, our elders, our pastors, even our buildings - but ultimately, we need to own our part of the journey. The blame game will ultimately just continue to deflect our energy from the centrality of our call to be witnesses to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We need to wrestle with a serious question. What can you and I do to reflect more fully the God of hope that we claim to believe in - so that those who have been wounded by the church; those who have never experienced the church; those who are hungry to be embraced - can experience new life?



Questions:

Chapter 37:

- ◇ **What happened after Ezekiel prophesied to the dry bones (7)?**
- ◇ **What happened after Ezekiel prophesied to the “breath” (9–10)? What did this all mean? (11–14)**
- ◇ **Ezekiel was told to write on two sticks, one was for Judah (v. 16) and the other for Joseph, then what was he to do? (16-19)**

Chapter 38:

- ◇ **What countries does Gog rule? List five allies that are named. In what period of time will all this take place? (1:16)**
- ◇ **What is the situation of Israel before he attacks?**
- ◇ **Was Gog or his attack predicted by former prophets? (17:23)**

Chapter 39:

- ◇ **How will Israel use Gog's weapons?**
- ◇ **What benefit will come to the LORD?**

Reflection:

What hinders the success of the Gospel?

In what ways have you seen God restore “dry bones”?

Biblical References:

Ezekiel	See and Compare
37:21-23	Isaiah 11:13; Jeremiah 3:18; Hosea 1:11
38 and 39	Revelation 20
39:28,29	Joel 2:28; Acts 2:1-4; 17, 38,39



A New Season of Ministry A Call to Renewed Life as an Exilic People

By Rev. Ruth Faith Santana-Grace

As I think about a new season of ministry, I resonate with the prophet Ezekiel and the complexity of the call God has placed upon him. I resonate with the fact that the children of God are an exilic people – wrestling with their identity in the culture wherein they live. I've come to understand that it is from this very place of exile that the church is called to proclaim and embody the Gospel.

Two observations strike me as I reflect on this familiar text. The first is that it is the hand of God that led Ezekiel to the valley of dry bones. It is not the hand of Ezekiel that led God to that place. It is God's hand by which we are to be led - even when that means we don't know what that means. I don't know about you, but I wrestle greatly with this temptation. I like knowing where I'm going - I like having a neat list with check marks indicating when I've accomplished my tasks. I suspect that more than once, I have mistaken my leading God with God leading me. I've mistaken my hopes and agenda for God's. I don't believe I'm alone in doing this.

I believe this is a temptation for many of us in the church – with our good intentions and hopes for the Church of Jesus Christ - local, regional, national and international. This text reminds us again that the source of inhuman possibilities and real hope lie only in God. It does not lie with our clever five-year plans or building expansions. It does not even lie in our creative strategic designs for the future.

The text reminds us of something even more powerful – it seems to be a simple truth, but clearly one that is challenging to embody. Wherever we proclaim God's word; wherever we invoke God's Holy Spirit, there will be new life. This is what we claim to believe. New life doesn't simply come from our good thoughts or words. It does not come from our good works. It too comes from God. We are not the source of possibilities for the church. We are vessels - encouraged, equipped and empowered by God.

As I have visited churches near and far, I've concluded that the primary challenges to the growth of our churches are not denominational issues and internal disagreements. These of course, don't help, but I do not believe they are the primary cause of our numerical decline or of what some believe, is our spiritual malaise. In fact, I've come to believe they often become a deflection or distraction from addressing our own internal disappointments or shortcomings.

