

HOPE IN THE VALLEY OF THE SKELETONS

[Ezekiel 37:1-14](#) “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..... and he said unto me, Prophecy upon these bones, and say unto them, O ye dry bones, hear the Word of the Lord ... and ye shall live.”

The Church of God, somewhat like the individual Christian, lives in a cycle of ups and downs. There have been many times of great spiritual activity followed by periods of hopelessness and despondency.

We find Israel, at times, worshipping the true God with great love and zeal, then dying spiritual life sets in and they turn to wickedness and idolatry.

It is no different in the New Testament. Just to mention one example, after a few short years of the truth Paul wrote to the Galatians, “I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel. ([Gal 1:6](#))

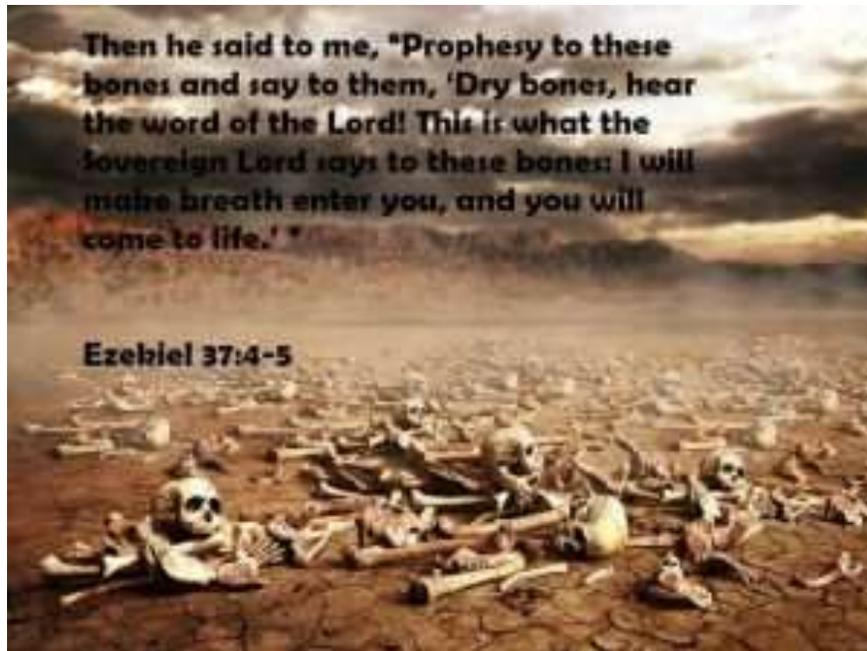
We are living in the latter days and we know what to expect, for Jesus told us, “Many false prophets shall arise and shall deceive Many.” All around us we see churches pulling up anchor and drifting away from the faith of our fathers.

Despite the dark outlook for so many churches, our text tells us there is hope even at a time of the lowest spiritual life. That hope is given us in a vision.

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1. THE APPARENT HOPELESSNESS OF THE VALLEY.

How did the prophet get to the valley? The Lord carried him there in a vision, similar to the manner in which St. John received the book of Revelation. The Lord brought him here to show him something unusual and to teach him a lesson.



It is hard even to imagine the scene before us. Ezekiel saw a desert of white, like a field of white grass in this desolate valley. Long ago a great tragedy took place and somehow thousands were slain and their bodies were left unburied to decay in the desert. Vultures and worms had long since eaten off every speck of flesh, and the bones were bleached in the sun, white and glistening. Skull bones, legs, arms, ribs were all scattered about and mixed together, verily a valley of skeletons. Ezekiel stood by this great sea of white, one solitary figure in the midst of this huge and open sepulcher. Surely the prophet must have felt weird at this moment and thought, "What meaneth this valley of dry bones?"

Suddenly the Lord put a startling question to the prophet, "Son of man, can these bones live?" The question was just as puzzling as the valley itself. Could anyone fit these bones together again where they originally belonged? It would be almost like picking up a bucket full of sand on the seashore and trying to fit the tiny grains together into the original rocks from which they came.

Can these bones live? As far as we humans are concerned, all answers to this question must be, "Impossible." If we look to the Lord for an answer we must say that He can do anything He wishes. This is the apparent hopelessness of the valley. Can such a desolate, open graveyard ever be revived?

The valley of the dry bones is a picture of the church at a spiritually low ebb. Because the Jews sinned against the Lord and rejected Him, He had

them carried away from the Holy Land into Babylon as captives. In Babylon they were spiritually depressed and were like the dry bones in the valley. At the time of our Savior the church was again like the valley of skeletons. The Pharisees and Sadducees with their teachings of self-righteousness had made a spiritual graveyard of the church. In fact, Jesus told the Pharisees that they were like whited sepulchers, which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but within are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. Jesus said the same thing to the church at Sardis ([Rev 3:1](#)), "I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, but thou art dead." At Luther's time the church was like bones bleached in the sun, a sad period indeed.

Today it seems as though we are again viewing a valley of skeletons whitening in the bright sun. Can these bones live? Is there any hope for churches steeped in worldliness and materialism in our day? What about ourselves individually, are we just a bundle of dead bones, or is there some spiritual life left in us? There is hope for all of us.

2. THE SURPRISING MIRACLE IN THE VALLEY

God told the prophet to speak to the dry bones and they would live (v1-6). Ezekiel was told to call to the bleached frames, and the bones would receive the power to rise to life. When Ezekiel did speak there was a great shaking and rattling as each bone found its proper place. Thus the valley of bones turned into an army of skeletons.

Soon another miracle took place. The sinews and flesh came upon the skeletons, and the army of skeletons quickly turned into an army of corpses. But without souls they could not live. So as in the original order of the creation of man by God, the corpses were now given the breath of life, and they became a living army of people. What does the Lord wish to teach us by this preview of what will happen on the great resurrection day at the end of the world?

The Lord promised to awaken the captive Jews. "Can these bones live?" Humanly speaking it was impossible, but the Lord brought it to pass. He said, "I will put my spirit in you, and ye shall live, and I shall place you in your own land" (v14). This He did, and certainly there was a spiritual revival in the return from captivity.



Jesus promised to send the Comforter, the Holy Spirit to the disciples and us. At Pentecost another surprising miracle took place in the valley of the skeletons as the New Testament Church was born in a great spiritual revival, when thousands and thousands were added to the Church. God raised up Luther to stand in the valley of dry bones and preach the everlasting Gospel to the world, and another stupendous miracle took place. The Reformation was born, and many bleached bones became alive. "Can these bones live?" They did.

Is there any hope for the Church of today, for you and for me? There is only one hope for all of us, hope that is in and with the Lord. He gave His Son Jesus Christ to die for us, and through faith in His cross we can be saved. It is the Holy Ghost who brings us to faith in Jesus. The Lord will freely give His Spirit to anyone who asks for this gift. Good works always follows true conversion. Yes, there is hope for us in Christ, and in Him alone.

Something similar to the vision in our text will happen to us and all believers on that last great day, for we shall be raised from the dead and live and reign with Christ forever and ever. Thank God, there is always hope for us, even in the valley of the skeletons. AMEN.

PRAYER. O holy and blessed Trinity, give us Thy saving Spirit that we may live in faith in our Savior. Awaken our slumbering souls and give us newness of life to walk before Thee as Thy true children should, knowing that the end of all things is near at hand. When this dreary journey is over may we rise from the dead to live with Thee forever. Hear us, for the sake of our dear Redeemer. AMEN.