

Sermon Wesley Box Hill 22 March 2026

GOD IN THE VALLEY – Ezekiel 37: 1-14

Greetings once again in the precious name of our Lord Saviour Jesus Christ.

Point No. 1 – God of revival

The story of the dry bones in Ezekiel 37 is an absolute go to by many preachers when they want to or feel inspired to speak revival into being

Why not?

Ezekiel, the man of God, was led by the Spirit of the LORD into a valley, and upon God's command prophesied life into the dry bones that filled the valley, and having obeyed this order an exceedingly great army was consequently raised

Now, I have not kept in touch with all the sermons in the world that has ever been preached, but I am sure that there are as many misses when the preacher gets worked up about how the when the word of God and God's Spirit become combined great things can happen for the listening congregation as there are hits, and something like a revival happens

Now, I am not trying to burst any bubbles here: but let's dig a little deeper

For a God who spoke the world into being, and crafted humankind from dust as well as fearfully and wonderfully within their mother's wombs, what is it to God when he asks any of us: "can these bones live?"

In verse 3, we appear to have the model answer from a man of God: "O Lord GOD, you know."

Not "yes", but "God, you know"

Certainly, God can do many things, with literally nothing being impossible for him

But certain things are not to be done by our own prerogatives

Ezekiel may have faltered from an utmost declaration of faith for a possibility of two reasons:

Firstly, he may have genuinely found it hard to believe whether a valley full of dry bones could live, since they have after all already lived once

Secondly, perhaps just as importantly, Ezekiel 37 was recorded within a context of God promising a return of favour to the nation of Israel, since Jerusalem had just fallen, and all of God's people were at that time recently sent to exile

God's favour, no matter how consistent it is with his character, was not to be offered on human command, and I believe even to this day cannot be promised on demand

After all, he is our God, and he will not give his glory to any other

Even if consistent with his character, God is not a vending machine with regards with his display of favour

And so, on the brink of no return from divine judgement, “O Lord God, you know”

Perhaps C. S. Lewis put it best in his description of Aslan: “He may not be safe, but he is good”

Point No. 2 – God of his word

So how do we interpret this passage?

Verses 11 to 12 tell us:

Then he said to me, “Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. Behold, they say, ‘Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are indeed cut off.’¹² Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord God: Behold, I will open your graves and raise you from your graves, O my people. And I will bring you into the land of Israel.

So, the immediate application of this passage was to the ancient house of Israel, and what Israel was saying about having lost hope and them as a nation being cut off was understandable, given that they had just entered into their period of exile

If applied to the Northern Kingdom of Israel, they were conquered by the Assyrian Empire in 722 BCE, while the Southern Kingdom of Judah were conquered by the Babylonians in 586 BCE

Given that the words of the prophesy applied to Israel, if it applied specifically to the Northern Kingdom, their bones would well and truly have been dried, their identities due to the assimilation policy of the Assyrian Empire would truly have been lost, and consequently they would totally consider themselves as having been completely cut off

As for those from the Southern Kingdom of Judah, they had every reason to expect a similar fate, having just been sent to exile like the other 10 tribes

Yet even from such a state, God promises a return of the nation into their land

Verses 13 to 14 tell us:

And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves, and raise you from your graves, O my people.¹⁴ And I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I am the Lord; I have spoken, and I will do it, declares the Lord.”

While some scholars have interpreted Ezekiel 37 can be applied to the re-establishing of Israel in the Promised Land, the repetition of graves being opened and the dead being raised from their graves might suggest something else

Within the New Testament, the Apostle Paul made a bold declaration about all Israel being saved

Romans 11: 26 to 27 say:

And in this way all Israel will be saved, as it is written,
“The Deliverer will come from Zion,
he will banish ungodliness from Jacob”;
²⁷“and this will be my covenant with them
when I take away their sins.”

And even though neither Ezekiel 37 nor Romans 11 have even technically happened, it would truly be a miss of God, who does not lie nor change his mind, to not make true this promise to his own people

Point No. 3 – God who keeps promises

If we do serve a God who is all-knowing, all-good and all-powerful, wouldn't it be within his character to keep his promises?

Here, we enter into a discussion on God's sovereignty

Firstly, no one has ever rightly claimed that all of the Bible's prophecies have been fulfilled

Scholars estimate that around 350 Old Testament prophecies were fulfilled by the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ

Meanwhile, around another 500 prophecies relate directly to the end times

If arguably Ezekiel 37 was one of them, other notable ones include the details of the Third Jerusalem Temple (Ezekiel 40 to 48), and the promise of global peace with reference to swords being beaten into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks (Isaiah 2: 4) etc.

Yet, because of the incredible accuracy of the fulfilment of so many prophecies already by the Person of Jesus Christ, it would be rather presumptuous to write off the claims of the Bible as impotent

Living in an age where the Messiah, long ago promised in the Old Testament, has already come, it is perhaps more prudent to take at his word the God who had his promises written down as recorded in his Scriptures

Conclusion – God in the Valley

Now, that an interpretation of Ezekiel 37 has been offered, what does this mean for us, and even for Wesley Box Hill?

Firstly, even after the coming of Christ, God has shown that he had not forsaken Israel, as confirmed by Paul in the New Testament

This means that God's gifts and calling are still irrevocable, and that he is still the same, yesterday, today and forever

We must also remember from today's readings that he too is the resurrection and the life, and that those who believe in Christ, though they die, yet they will still live

And because the prerogative and the initiative should be with God alone, the greater glory should also belong to him

Brothers and sisters, as Wesley Box Hill you have been through your fair share of tough times

Yet God will not abandon you in the valley, since he is not only the God of the hills but also of the valleys

It just so happened that last weekend I had preached on Psalm 23

And it just so happens that my favourite portion of Psalm 23 is also about a valley

So, let's remind ourselves what that valley looks like

Psalm 23: 4 to 6

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,^[c]

I will fear no evil,
for you are with me;
your rod and your staff,
they comfort me.

⁵ You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies;
you anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.

⁶ Surely^[d] goodness and mercy^[c] shall follow me
all the days of my life,
and I shall dwell^[f] in the house of the Lord
forever.^[g]

Wesley Box Hill, God will never abandon you

In fact, he will prepare a table before you in the presence of your enemies, anoint your head with oil, with your cup of blessing filled to overflowing

Surely goodness and mercy will follow you all the days of your life, where the faithful will dwell in the house of the Lord forever

May God bless the hearing of this word, AMEN