

CAN THESE BONES LIVE?

Ezekiel 37:1-14

When Sandy was in elementary school, she and her friends were frightened out of their wits by the Vincent Price movie *House on Haunted Hill*. Years later, in an article about the movie, she was surprised to read a plot summary. Plot? It had a plot? She couldn't remember any story line to the movie, only that it was terrifying.

There was one disappointment in *House on Haunted Hill*. The advertising promised an “Emergo” effect in which, at some key point in the movie, a skeleton would fly out over the heads of the audience. No skeleton appeared. Maybe that was better. A swooping skeleton would have induced even more nightmares in that group of young friends.

Skeletons unsettle us because they indicate death. If you see a skeleton, it means the person is no longer alive. For the prophet Ezekiel, a valley of scattered skeletons spoke only of death—until God showed him a vision of a miraculous return to life.

Group Discussion. What symbolizes death for you? What symbolizes life?

Personal Reflection. When has God changed an apparently hopeless situation into a hopeful one for you?

As Isaiah had warned, the Babylonians under Nebuchadnezzar attacked Judah and began to forcibly deport Jewish captives to Babylon. The priest Ezekiel was one of those early exiles. In his thirtieth year, which was the fifth year of the exile, he received dramatic visions from the Lord (Ezekiel 1:1-3). He had subsequent visions over the next years. In the twelfth year of the exile he received shocking firsthand news that

the city of Jerusalem had fallen (Ezekiel 33:21-22).

Up to chapter 34 of Ezekiel's prophecy, his messages to the Jewish exiles are filled with warnings about sin and calls for repentance. In chapters 34 and 36 the tone begins to change as the Lord sends encouraging messages about restoration and homecoming. By the time we come to the vision of the valley of bones in chapter 37, a momentum is established of promises for future restoration. *Read Ezekiel 37:1-10.*

1. What series of remarkable events took place in verses 1-2?
2. What might have been Ezekiel's impressions and reactions to what he was shown in verses 1-2?
3. When the Lord asked, "Son of man, can these bones live?" Ezekiel gave a rather indirect answer (v. 3). Why do you think he answered in that way?
4. The Lord gave Ezekiel a startling assignment in verses 4-6. What were the promised results?
5. Ezekiel obeyed the Lord and spoke to the bones and then to the

breath. What happened in the two stages of his prophesying (vv. 7-10)?

6. What do you think the events of verses 7-10 looked and sounded like?

7. *Read Ezekiel 37:11-14.* How did the Lord interpret for Ezekiel what he had just seen?

8. Right then, how and why did Israel's situation seem as hopeless as a valley of dry bones?

9. The Lord quoted Israel's pessimistic view of the future (v. 11). How was Ezekiel instructed to inject hope into their pessimism (vv. 12-14)?

10. How did the Lord answer his own question ("Can these bones live?")? Not just that he answered yes, but how did he go about answering?

11. This Scripture's application to our own lives is tricky because we

don't know for sure which situations we should see as hopeful (the Lord intends to breathe new life into them) and which are not in his purposes for us (either they're bad ideas or just not in his timing now). In any case, what personal connection do you feel with Ezekiel's experience?

12. In what areas do you need wisdom to know whether to hope for specific change or to back off from pushing for change?

13. What hopeful action will you take this week to place your hope in the Lord rather than in circumstances?



Whether or not specific outcomes are in the Lord's plan for us, we can have hope in him and in his good purposes. Pray for an attitude of expectancy to be always on the lookout for God's good work in your life.

NOW OR LATER

Study John 5:16-30, in which Jesus says that a time is coming when the dead will hear his voice and will be raised to life, whether to eternal life or to condemnation, and that he has been given this authority by the Father.

Study Romans 8:18-27, in which Paul expresses the tension between ultimate hope and present suffering.