

A VAST ARMY OF GOD

Ezekiel 37:1-14
Key verse 37:10

"So I prophesied as he commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet—a vast army."

As we begin 2021, we are studying five special lessons from Isaiah 6, 1 Peter 2, Acts 19, Ezekiel 37, and Ezra 7 to see God's vision and receive God's direction on how to serve the campus mission victoriously this year.

Through Acts 19, we learned about the disciple-making ministry through Paul's intensive Bible study in Ephesus. Paul spoke daily for two years in the school of Tyrannus. He even exhorted each of the leaders day and night for three years with tears (Acts 20:31). Ephesus thus became the spiritual headquarter and the whole province of Asia heard the word of the Lord. Thanks and praise be to the Lord, who has something great in store for us this year: to use each of our house churches as spiritual headquarters through intensive Bible study, so that all of Germany, Europe and the Muslim countries hear the Word of the Lord.

In Ezekiel 37:1-14, God showed Ezekiel a vision for the Israelites, who resembled withered dead bones, that by the power of the Word and the Spirit of God they would come to life again and stand on their feet as an exceedingly great army. To this end, he commanded Ezekiel to prophesy to the bones and to speak to the breath to come and blow on those who had been killed. Ezekiel obeyed out of absolute trust. Let us see God's vision and, like Ezekiel, proclaim the Word of God this year through the obedience of faith through one-on-one Bible study, and experience God's vision through

the power of the Holy Spirit in making disciples and mobilizing the next generation.

1. A Valley Full of Dead Bones (1-3)

Let's read verses 1 and 2: "The hand of the LORD was upon me, and he brought me out by the Spirit of the LORD and set me in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. He led me back and forth among them, and I saw a great many bones on the floor of the valley, bones that were very dry.." Ezekiel was a priest who was taken away to Babylon with the second group in 597 BC. There God called him to be a prophet in his 30th year. For 21 years he proclaimed God's message among those taken away. What was God's message through Ezekiel to his people? First, God reminded them how unfaithful and ungodly they had been and how they had brought God's righteous judgment upon themselves. But then God gave them the message with the vision of complete restoration. 36:24-28 say, "For I will take you out of the nations; I will gather you from all the countries and bring you back into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. You will live in the land I gave your forefathers; you will be my people, and I will be your God.." God re-

vealed his will for them. He would be their God who dwelt among them (Ezek 43:7), and they would be His people who worshiped Him. The people to whom Ezekiel preached were a house of contradiction with hard foreheads. But Ezekiel's forehead was even harder, like diamond. Thus, God's message penetrated, and in this way God prepared His people for restoration.

Part of the message of restoration is the vision of the bones of the dead coming to life. God gave Ezekiel this vision shortly after the latter heard of the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple (586 B.C.). Let's look again at verses 1 and 2. God led Ezekiel in the vision across a wide field full of dead bones. He led him all over it. There were a great many bones lying there, scattered all over the field, and they were all withered.

God first showed Ezekiel the sobering condition of the bones. According to verse 11, these bones were the whole house of Israel. They were defeated and struck down because of their sin. No one could have hope for these bones anymore.

But God's heart was not hopeless. Nor had he rejected his people. Let us read verse 3: "He asked me, "Son of man, can these bones live?" I said, "O Sovereign LORD , you alone know." God's question to Ezekiel shows that He had something great in mind for these bones. He wanted to bring them back to life. God's heart was full of compassion and love for His people. God's mind was full of vision for them to come back to life. That is why he asked, "Son of man, can these bones live?"

The Israelites themselves no longer believed that they could be helped. When we read verse 11, they said, "Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off." Ezekiel, too, must have been shocked when he heard of the destruction of the temple. For years he had warned the people about it and called them to repentance, but they had not listened. In fact, they seemed hopeless now. But this was not so.

God's heart burned unchanged for his people. The living God who chose Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, who led his people out of slavery in Egypt with great signs, and who gave them his holy commandments on Mount Horeb, he wanted to make his people alive, even though they now completely resembled withered dead bones.

Here we learn from God: First, there is no impossibility with Him. He is the Creator who can resurrect even dead bones. No bones are too withered that they cannot come to life. Second, he wants sinners who are dead to be restored. The Israelites had sinned unimaginably and had run into their doom with their eyes open. Yet God was burning to save His people and restore them to life. God's fire of love was so hot that He could not remain idle. Third, God took action. The vision God gave Ezekiel was the beginning of a great work of restoration. Let's read verse 3 again, "He asked me, "Son of man, can these bones live?" I said, "O Sovereign LORD , you alone know."

How did Ezekiel respond? Ezekiel could have said, "No, you can't." But Ezekiel responded out of his faith, "O Sovereign LORD, you alone know." Ezekiel saw nothing but bones and dust. But when he heard God's question, he also saw God's vision of those bones coming to life. He confessed his faith in God's omnipotence and God's love, "O Sovereign Lord, you alone know." By confessing his faith, he made himself completely available to God's will.

Nehemiah responded similarly, 140 years later. When he heard that the walls of Jerusalem lay broken and the people were in disgrace and calamity, he wept, fasted and prayed. At the same time, he heard God's question, "Son of man, can these bones live?" He confessed his faith, and God, through Nehemiah, mobilized the Israelites to rebuild.

God used the faith of these men, Ezekiel and Nehemiah, to continue the restoration of His people as the kingdom of priests and

holy nation and to prepare for the coming of the Messiah. Unbelief makes people helpless and paralyzes them. Faith, however, can be used preciously by God in His work of restoration. Faith means making oneself available to the will of God. Therefore, how precious is a person who has faith!

God has used the faith of some lay missionaries and Bible teachers in UBF in the past 60 years to start the spiritual restoration in many countries, including Europe. Europe had become a field full of withered dead bones because of godless humanism. God's heart, however, was burning for Europe. He asked His people, "Can these bones live?" His desire and will was to bring those withered bones back to life. In Korea, some young people answered, "O Sovereign Lord, you alone know," and offered themselves to God for His work without any ifs or buts. God miraculously led them and began His work of restoration through them. How about us: do we hear God's question about whether these bones will come back to life, and how do we answer? God is leading us today in the Spirit to each faculty of Bonn University, to the campus of Bonn-Rhein-Sieg University of Applied Sciences, and to Koblenz University, asking us, "Can these bones live?" He also makes us think of Germany and Europe and asks, "Do you believe this will again become a shepherd nation and a missionary-sending continent?" God wants to make alive the bones of the dead. He wants to make a new beginning through you, even to the ends of the earth.

2. A vast Army of God (4-14)

Ezekiel was God's instrument in the great work of spiritual restoration of His people. What task was he given? Let us read verses 4-6: "Then he said to me, "Prophecy to these bones and say to them, 'Dry bones, hear the word of the LORD ! This is what the Sovereign LORD says to these bones: I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life. I will attach tendons to you and make flesh come upon you and cover you

with skin; I will put breath in you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the LORD." Ezekiel was to prophesy to the bones. He was to speak to them even though they had no ears. But God's command was clear: "Prophecy to these bones and speak to them." He was to address them, hear from them (though of course they said nothing), talk to them, and give them the word of God: "Dry bones, hear the word of the LORD!" He was to speak about what God was going to do and what He was going to do with them. Let's read verse 5 and 6 again. God wanted to put breath in them and make them come to live again. He was going to cover them with tendons, flesh and skin, and they were going to know that He is the Lord.

Ezekiel obeyed God's command and prophesied. Consider verse 7: "So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I was prophesying, there was a noise, a rattling sound, and the bones came together, bone to bone." When he obeyed, something unexpected happened. There began to be a rustling among the bones. The bones stirred, and the bones moved together. Ezekiel marveled and saw tendons and skin growing on the bones. There was still no breath in them, but they looked like people again. The preaching of the Word of God through the obedience of faith set the bones of the dead in motion.

Here we see that the Word of God has creation power. The bones were dead, it was impossible for them to become alive again. But the Word of God makes even dead bones alive. When I came to Bible study in my 7th semester, I was like dead bones. I was full of despair and thought I could never be liberated from the dominion of lust and self-glorification. Fellow students, relatives and friends also thought: He is just like that, that I am his character. But a Bible teacher prophesied over me the Word of God for four years. Finally, Romans 13:14 asked me to let Jesus be Lord. When I heard, accepted and obeyed the word, the miracle happened that I was set free from ego domination and allowed to make a new

beginning under the Lordship of Jesus. God's servants experienced the creation power of God's word.

For a long time, a young man seemed to be a hopeless case. He let his desires and feelings guide him and lived like an irresponsible playboy, causing many conflicts and heartache among his parents. But his shepherd prophesied over him the word of God. Deuteronomy 6:5 worked in him that he accepted God's absolute love and decided to give his body for God. Now he is no longer guided by desires and feelings, but by the word of God. Even in a time of strong temptation, he heard God's word from 2 Tim 2:15, strengthened his identity as a Bible teacher, now responsibly serves the work of mobilizing the next generation with the spirit and faith of Nehemiah, and witnesses among them the power of God's word.

Another young man grew up in the believing environment and participated in the church life. However, he was dead in the sin of selfishness. A servant of God, with prayer, gave him the task of writing an essay on the life of Jesus according to Hebrews 5:8,9: "Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him." As he reflected on the life and suffering of Jesus, his thinking was changed. Now he considers Jesus, who suffered for sinners, the most precious thing in life. He accepted baptism and decided to participate in Christ's suffering for the world mission with joy. Who could have hope for such withered bones as me or these young people? But God's word has power to change. The way to change a person is to prophesy the word of God to him.

Let's look at verse 8. Verse 8 ends with the words, "But there was no breath in them." God wanted to bring these dead bones back to life. To do that, they needed the breath. Let's read verse 9: "Then he said to me, "Prophesy to the breath; prophesy, son of man, and say to it, 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Come from the

four winds, O breath, and breathe into these slain, that they may live." Ezekiel was to prophesy again, this time to the breath. The "breath" is mentioned nine times in this passage (incl. "spirit" in verse 1). By breath is meant the Spirit of God. Ezekiel was to prophesy to the Spirit, "Come from the four winds, o breath, and breathe into these slain, that they may live!" Ezekiel obeyed. What happened? Let's read verse 10: "So I prophesied as he commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet-a vast army." A miracle of God happened. The breath of God came into the bones of the dead and made them alive. God's Spirit gave them new, spiritual life and transformed them into living beings.

To prophesy to the breath is to pray. God's Word restores the bones, and the Spirit makes them alive. A Bible teacher should always be a praying person. Then we experience how people who are like spiritless bones become spiritually alive and bring forth the glorious fruits of the Spirit.

A missionary house church had two children. The first son was born when they had just entered their mission field, and the second son was born three years later with complications. The parents knew that it would not be easy for their sons to grow up in a culture that was hostile to Christ and performance-oriented, and to choose to live for God. That's why they prayed. The mother prayed that they would be used by God as camp shepherds and trailblazers for Jesus. That's when the Spirit of God worked. Her first son decided to be a Bible teacher like Ezra; the second son, according to Matthew 6:33, to make the priority of his life the kingdom of God and His righteousness. God's Spirit works through prayer and makes the bones of the dead alive.

A child was told before he started school that he had too low an IQ and therefore should go to a special school. But his mother began to pray with him according to Gen 1:1 and John 9:3 that God's works might be revealed in him. Then the Spirit of God

worked. He made the dead bone alive. The boy was not only able to enter the regular school, but there he became a witness that God is alive and became a challenge to many who had sinned in unbelief.

There was a young woman who seemed to be more interested in the things of the world, fashion, human fellowship, than in spiritual things. However, her parents, co-workers and God's servants came to God in constant prayer. Then God's Spirit worked in her through Bible study. She decided to be baptized and has since testified that God has given her true peace and true meaning of life in Jesus. God gives us a command, "Prophesy!" By prophesying and praying, we may experience through one-on-one Bible study the power of God's Word and the power of God's Spirit to make alive the bones of the dead.

Let's look at verse 10 again: "So I prophesied as he commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet-a vast army." God showed Ezekiel the bones that came to life in his vision. They were an exceedingly great army of God. They stood on their feet equipped with helmets, armor and swords and ready for battle, a vast army. God's vision of restoration is a vast army of God. The believers are God's army. They are His army in the work of world mission.

Marie Durand and her brother Pierre were just ordinary people in human terms. Marie was 19 years old when she was imprisoned for her faith. But to God, they were His vast army. The persecutors sought to break their resistance and prevent the faith from spreading further. But Pierre gave his life, and Marie resisted for 38 years, and the gospel faith spread throughout France and beyond to many countries around the world.

Dr. Lee grew up as a half-orphan in the grim situation of the Korean War. He could not understand why his people had to suffer so much and be so poor. The students of his time had no perspective for the future and were full of fatalism. But through Ephesians

2:10, he received that he himself was God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for him to do. In other words, he took in that he was God's vast army. He fought against the beggar spirit of the students in Korea and set them up as world mission workers. Then he fought against the complacency of young people in the U.S. and trained them as disciples. He often wore military clothes to make his identity clear. God used him and many who followed him as a vast army for a great revival work.

Through Bible study, a young man received Jesus as the way, the truth and the life and found clear direction for a life of discipleship. He overcame challenges in study, found a good job, and build a house church. But he did not just enjoy blessings. When his faith was tested, he stood on God's side as God's vast army. Now he faithfully equips himself by the word of God and struggles to cooperate for God's mission work and help some young people with the life-giving word of God for this purpose.

God's vision has nothing to do with a "feel-good" gospel. God's vision is a vast army for world mission. God's army enjoys the privilege of training in discipline and obedience. They are allowed to learn not to occupy themselves with trivial things or get involved in mundane matters. They may learn to be ready at all times, day and night. They may also learn to handle rightly the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God. In this respect, the church of God is a spiritual training camp. God has the vision, through an exceedingly great army, to conquer the whole world - even where it seems impossible - through the gospel.

Consider still verses 11-14. After the vision, God revealed to Ezekiel what He intended to do with His people. He would bring them up from their graves and bring them back into their land. Then they would recognize that he is the Lord and worship him as their Lord. This vision was fulfilled when the Israelites returned 70 years after the destruction of the temple and rededicated the temple. In

Ezekiel's time it was still unthinkable, but he proclaimed to them the plan and will of God, so that they could recognize that God is the Lord and that there was a prophet among them (13.14): "Then you, my people, will know that I am the LORD , when I open your graves and bring you up from them. I will put my Spirit in you and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land. Then you will know that I the LORD have spoken, and I have done it, declares the LORD."

God gave us a concrete vision: He wants to make alive the dead bones at the 1700 universities in Europe and use Germany as a shepherd nation and Europe as a missionary sending continent for the world mission. He has promised it and is doing it. Because of this vision of God, we are working through forming one-to-one Bible studies for disciple making and mobilizing the next generation. God is making the dead bones alive through His Spirit and raising them up as His vast army.

Today God has shown us His vision for a field full of dead bones. His vision is restoration. His vision is a vast army. This year, let us lead one-to-one Bible study with prayer and experience the power of God's Word and Spirit. God bless each of us with God's vision of the restoration of Germany and Europe.