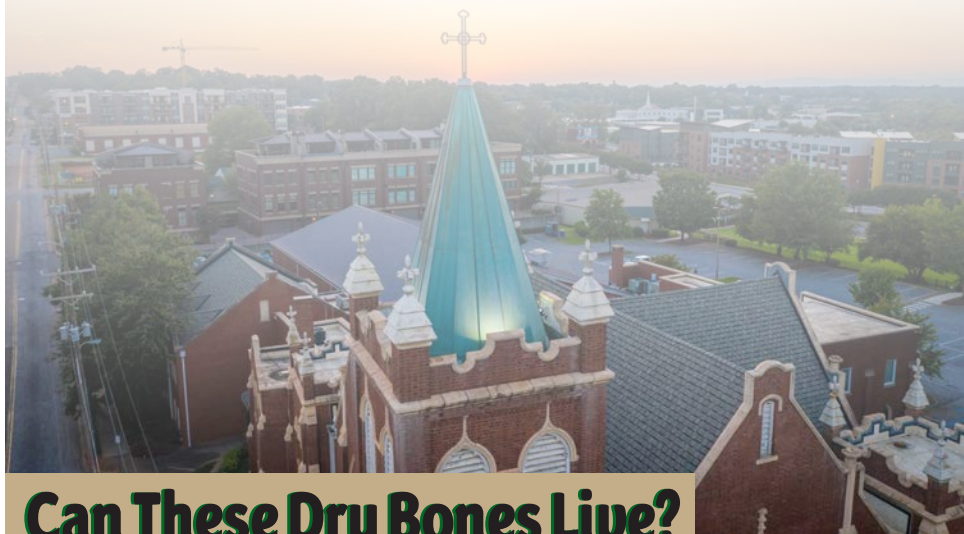


The West End Herald

Second Presbyterian Church, Greenville, SC



Can These Dry Bones Live?

Resurrection in Ezekiel



Is a future resurrection of the dead part of the teaching of the Book of Ezekiel in the Old Testament? This may seem like an obscure question for Christians living in the twenty-first century. What does a major Israelite prophet from hundreds of years ago have to do with us?

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Vol. CXXXIV, Edition 17

May 3, 2026

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When we understand Ezekiel's vision of resurrection, we not only understand God's word better, but we have hope for the future because we see that sin and death are not ultimate.

But first, let's establish some ground rules. After establishing what genre we are in, I'll explain briefly the two kinds of resurrection that we see in Ezekiel chapters 37 and 40–48, and then I'll briefly apply the text.

What Genre Are We In?

In order to interpret the text of Ezekiel properly, we must ask first, what *kind of literature* are we reading? The genre of literature can determine if we ought to interpret a text literally or symbolically. If we don't establish the genre, then it's as if we are playing a sports game but don't know what the rules are; do we kick the ball, hit it with a club, or throw it? Chapters 37 and 40–48, which contribute to the teaching on resurrection, must be recognized in the genre of *symbolic prophetic visions*.

Three features in Ezekiel 40:1-4, characterize this kind of literature. First, note the expression “the hand of the Lord (Yahweh) was upon me.” This phrase is found precisely seven times in Ezekiel (Ezek. 1:3; 3:14; 3:22; 8:1; 33:22; 37:1; 40:1). The first three instances mark the beginning and ending of the first vision in 1–3. The fourth occurrence marks the beginning of the second vision in Ezekiel 8–11. The fifth occurrence marks the end of Ezekiel's muteness and the fulfillment of all his prophecies concerning the fall of Jerusalem. The sixth instance is at the beginning of the vision of the dry bones. Lastly, the seventh occurrence is at the beginning of the final vision of the restored City/Temple in Ezekiel 40–48. All are key points in the plot structure of Ezekiel.

The second feature that marks Ezekiel 37, 40–48 as symbolic visions is the movement of Ezekiel by the Spirit of God.

- Ezek. 3:12 “the Spirit lifted me up”
- Ezek. 3:14 “the Spirit lifted me up and took me away”
- Ezek. 8:3 “the Spirit lifted me between earth and heaven ... and ... he took me”
- Ezek. 11:1 “then the Spirit lifted me up and brought me”
- Ezek. 11:24 “the Spirit lifted me up and brought me to the exiles in Babylonia in the vision given by the Spirit of God”
- Ezek. 37:01 “he brought me out by the Spirit of Yahweh and set me in ... a valley”
- Ezek. 43:05 “he took me to the land of Israel and set me on a very high mountain”

In Ezekiel 40:1 the text says, “and he brought me there” (i.e., by the Spirit). This, in combination with the instance in Ezekiel 43:5 shows that Ezekiel 40–48 belongs in genre to the same visions we have in Ezekiel 1–3, 8–11, and 37.

The third reason why Ezekiel 37, 40–48 are symbolic visions is in Ezekiel 40:2. It states, “he brought me in *visions of God* to the land of Israel.” With

CALVARY PRESBYTERY

Ministry of the Week

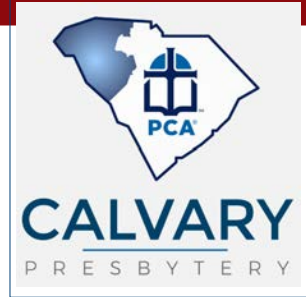
Melton Duncan
Presbytery Stated Clerk

Rick Heiser
Moderator

Josh Martin
Vice Moderator

David Bragdon
Treasurer

Robert Cathcart
Recording Clerk



Since 1973, Calvary Presbytery has been a regional body of congregations within the South Carolina Upcountry. We are members of the Presbyterian Church in America, the largest Bible Believing Presbyterian denomination in the United States.

Calvary Presbytery Membership includes 125 Ministers of the Gospel, called Teaching Elders and the representatives called Ruling Elders of 42 particular Churches & Mission Works. Our churches are home to over 10,000 Christians in 13 SC Counties.

Calvary Presbytery sponsors four area College Reformed University Fellowship (RUF) campus ministries (Anderson, Clemson, Furman, Wofford) and also Reformed University Fellowship International at Clemson.



The prayers in this book are drawn from the largely forgotten deposit of Puritan spiritual exercises, meditations, and aspirations. They testify to the richness and colour of evangelical thought and language that animated vital piety in an important stream of English religious life. ~Arthur Bennett

Blessed LORD Jesus,

Before thy cross I kneel and see
the heinousness of my sin,
my iniquity that caused thee to be 'made a curse',
the evil that excites the severity of divine wrath.
Show me the enormity of my guilt by
the crown of thorns,
the pierced hands and feet,
the bruised body,
the dying cries.
Thy blood is the blood of incarnate God,
its worth infinite, its value beyond all thought.
Infinite must be the evil and guilt
that demands such a price.
Let me walk humbly in the lowest depths
of humiliation,
bathed in thy blood,
tender of conscience,
triumphing gloriously as an heir of salvation.



at the corner of

River &
Rhett

Ladies Fall Bible Studies

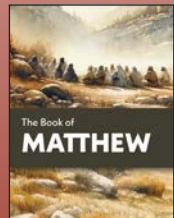
PRECEPTS *Mary Settle, teacher*

This Ladies Bible Study has ended until September when they will begin a study in Romans. An announcement will be made this summer regarding dates and book orders.



RAFIKI *Sylvia Long, teacher*

This 20-week class on Matthew will begin September 14. Ladies will need to order lesson materials from: <https://resources.rafikifoundation.org/products/matthew-group-bible-study> or call (352) 483-9131. Please let Sylvia Long know if you are ordering and intend to join this Bible study in the Fall.



MAY

Birthdays

- 4 Rafe Johnson
- 5 Sarah Moore, Tracy Morgan, Mariah Windt
- 6 Everett Branigin, Nora Hughes, Mary Settle
- 7 Kennedy McDaniel, Sophia Scott,
James Van Steenburgh
- 8 Rebekah Johnson, Chris Nieto
- 9 Cindy Duncan, James Early, Kyle Manly



This Week

MORNING SERMON

Dr. Richard D. Phillips

FELLOW WORKERS IN THE GOSPEL

2 Corinthians 8:16–9:5

EVENING SERMON

Rev. Brendon J. Branigin

FOR THE SAKE OF YOU

1 Peter 1:20–21

Sunday, May 3

- 8:30 A.M. MORNING WORSHIP
9:55 A.M. Children's Chapel (*Sanctuary*)
10:00 A.M. Children/Youth/Adult Sunday School
11:00 A.M. MORNING WORSHIP
5:00 P.M. Finance Committee (*Conference Room*)
5:30 P.M. Season of Prayer (*Chapel*)
6:00 P.M. EVENING WORSHIP

Monday, May 4

- 6:30 A.M. Men's Bible Study (*Fellowship Hall*)
6:00 P.M. Diaconate Meeting (*Conference Room*)

Wednesday, May 6

- 5:00 P.M. Pastoral Care Committee (*Office Work Room*)
5:15 P.M. WIC Council (*Conference Room*)
5:30 P.M. FAMILY NIGHT FELLOWSHIP SUPPER (*Gym*)
6:30 P.M. CAT Kids (Ages 3–Grade 4); Covenant Kids (Grades 5–8)
6:45 P.M. WIC Circle 1 (*Conference Room*)
6:45 P.M. Ministry Moment (*Gym*)
7:00 P.M. Jr. & Sr. High Bible Studies
7:00 P.M. Adult Prayer Meeting & Bible Study (*Gym*)

Thursday, May 7

- 6:30 P.M. LightBringers (*Fellowship Hall*)

Friday, May 8

- 12:00 P.M. Men's Luncheon and Bible Study (*Gym*)
1:30 P.M. Mission to Main (*Conference Room*)
6:00 P.M. Friday Night Alive (*R. Phillips Home*)

Upcoming Events

spcgreenville.org/calendar

May 7	LightBringers
May 13	Graduation Banquet
May 20	CAT Kids Program
May 27	Summer Children's Choir Begins
May 31	Adult Summer Sunday School Begins
July 6-10	Vacation Bible School

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abstract nouns, the plural in Hebrew often refers to a characteristic or condition.¹ Moreover, in Ezekiel, *ʾēlōhîm* is an appellative or common noun and not a name or proper noun.² So the phrase is best translated “a divine vision.” As Ezekiel scholar Drew N. Grumbles explains, “one better understands the genitive not in terms of content (“I saw God”), but in terms of genre (“I saw a divine vision”).³

The expression “in visions of God” is found elsewhere only in Ezekiel 1:1 and 8:3. We must, therefore, interpret the vision in Ezekiel 40–48 consistently with the visions in Ezekiel 1–3 and 8–11. These are *prophetic visions*. In a dream at night or vision the prophet is shown something which addresses all of his senses, experienced primarily in terms of sound and sight. Colourful images, metaphors and symbols characterise the divine communication. This genre establishes that the visions are future-oriented, and that we ought to interpret the figures as pointing to something beyond themselves.

What Does the Text Mean?

Having established the genre, we can now interpret Ezekiel 37 and 40–48 by asking three questions:

- (1) what is described by the prophet?
- (2) what is the historical / physical reality referred to in the vision? and
- (3) how do the images / metaphors / symbols in the vision communicate?

What is Described?

In American newspapers, an editorial cartoon may portray a donkey and an elephant. These beasts represent the Democratic and Republican parties respectively (just as the beasts in Daniel 7 or Revelation 13 represent political powers). But *the way they are portrayed* is the means used by the cartoonist to shape our perspective.

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Announcements

Spring Shower

All ladies are invited to a bridal shower for Alex Roten & Paola Perez on Saturday, May 30, beginning at 10:00 A.M. in the Fellowship Hall. Registry: amazon.com/registry

Graduates!

Please email the church office with the names of any high school or post-high school young people who will graduate this spring or summer. Also, please provide the school from which they are graduating and their next steps if known. These young people will be honored at the annual Graduation Banquet on Wednesday, May 13. Our speaker this year is Mr. Chase Haws, seminary student at Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary and intern here at SPC.

Men of the Covenant

Men (9th grade and above) will be having their last breakfast and teaching time on Saturday, May 16, beginning at 8:00 A.M. in the Gym. Meat will be provided, but men are asked to bring other breakfast items to share. Meetings will resume in the Fall.

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Two visions in Ezekiel address the question of resurrection, one directly and one indirectly. In chapter 37 Ezekiel sees a valley of dry bones. As he prophesies, the bones are connected together by tendons; flesh and skin are added to the skeletons, and finally breath is breathed into them and they live again. Then Ezekiel is given the interpretation of the symbolic vision in Ezekiel 37:11–14:

11 Then he [the Lord] said to me:

“Son of man, these bones are the people of Israel. They say,
‘Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off.’

12 Therefore prophesy and say to them:

‘This is what the Sovereign Lord says:

My people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them; I will bring you back to the land of Israel. 13 Then you, my people, will know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves and bring you up from them. 14 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.’” (NIV)

What is the Historical / Physical Reality?

The bones represent the people of Israel in exile. The resurrection portrays return from exile to live in their own land. This interpretation is confirmed by the second section in Ezekiel 37:15-28. Here Ezekiel is told to join sticks representing Ephraim and Judah:

20 Hold before their eyes the sticks you have written on 21 and say to them, 'This is what the Sovereign Lord says: I will take the Israelites out of the nations where they have gone. I will gather them from all around and bring them back into their own land. 22 I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel. There will be one king over all of them and they will never again be two nations or be divided into two kingdoms. (NIV)

As the author goes around the same topic a second time according to the familiar pattern of Hebrew literature, it is absolutely clear that resurrection is a *metaphor* for full return from exile, and the divided kingdom will be one kingdom once more.

The final vision in the book of Ezekiel is chapter 40–48 and this vision addresses the doctrine of resurrection indirectly. Elsewhere I have given much space to show that this is a picture portrayal of the new creation.⁴ Almost all of the citations or allusions to Ezekiel 40–48 are in Revelation 21–22 where John is describing the new creation:

Some Allusions to Ezekiel 40–48 in Revelation	
EZEKIEL	REVELATION
40:2	21:10
40:3, 5	21:15
47:1	22:1
47:12	22:2, 14, 19
48:16–17	21:16–17
48:30–35	21:12–13



The imagery of the river of life and the tree of life (Ezek. 47:1–12) also point to a description of the New Jerusalem in the new heavens and earth. So here, the symbolic portrayal of the city / temple in the final section of Ezekiel implies not only return from exile but also resurrection from the dead in a future physical sense.

How do the Images / Metaphors / Symbols in the Vision Communicate?

Ezekiel’s prophecy employs resurrection as a metaphor for the full restoration of God’s people from exile as one kingdom under one Davidic

king. Then he paints a symbolic picture of the new creation, the new heavens and earth where the city of God and the temple of God are one and the same and all living therein are completely holy or devoted to God. The Apostle John in Revelation interprets this text as referring to the new heavens and earth established after a physical resurrection from the dead. Thus, even though there is no one explicit verse in the book foretelling the resurrection, the larger storyline of the book of Ezekiel—and especially chapters 37 and 40–48—looks forward to resurrection.

Conclusion

Ezekiel's vision can communicate powerfully to us today just as it did to the exiles of Judah. The circumstances of their lives looked like a huge mess of dead bones. In the midst of their sin and the consequences thereof, life seemed without hope. But death was not the last word for them, and it is not for us. God promised a resurrection, not only a future bodily resurrection, but a resurrection from spiritual death. He promised his people new life and a new covenant in which the Spirit of God energizes the believer from within to walk in ways pleasing to God (see 1 Thess. 4:8, a direct allusion to Ezekiel 37). Sin and death don't have the last word. There is hope. Not only do we become new creation in Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 5:17), but in Jesus Christ, both Jew and Gentile become living stones in the restored Temple (2 Cor. 3:3, 1 Pet. 2:5) where God is *there*. The game is still being played, but the outcome has already been determined. God wins. Death will die, and sin will cease. And because we're on his team, the victory is ours. ♦

¹Christo H. J. van der Merwe, Jacobus A. Naudé, and Jan H. Kroeze, *A Biblical Hebrew Reference Grammar*, 2nd ed. (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), § 24.3.3 (6).

²Walther Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 2: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel, Chapters 25–48*, trans. James D. Martin (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 557–58.

³Drew N. Grumbles, *YHWH is There: Ezekiel's Temple Vision as a Type* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2021), 57.

⁴See Peter J. Gentry, "Ezekiel 40–48 — A Fantastic Vision," *Perichoresis* 22, no. 2 (2024): 4–17.

Peter J. Gentry is the distinguished visiting professor of Old Testament at Phoenix Seminary and senior research fellow for the Text & Canon Institute. He is the co-author, with Stephen Wellum, of *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants* (Crossway, 2012).

