

The Year of Discipleship in 3-D

(Further Developing Devoted Followers of Christ)



Welcome! Growing into more fully-devoted followers of Christ, may this time help all: **Grow Upward** into a more mature personal relationship and commitment to Christ Jesus faithful to God's Word!

Grow Outward to neighbor and world around, learning how to love well and to lead in what matters to God - guided by God's Word, by Jesus Himself, and by the Holy Spirit!

And, **Grow Inward** to discover a more contemplative faith, enhanced by both silence and prayer!

The Scripture for Sunday, December 5 2021

[STUDY LESSON 13]

THE OLD TESTAMENT READING:

Ezekiel 37:1-14

{1} The hand of the LORD came upon me, and he brought me out by the spirit of the LORD and set me down in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. {2} He led me all around them; there were very many lying in the valley, and they were very dry. {3} He said to me, "Mortal, can these bones live?" I answered, "O LORD GOD, you know." {4} Then he said to me, "Prophesy to these bones, and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. {5} Thus says the LORD GOD to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. {6} I will lay sinews on you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live; and you shall know that I am the LORD."

{7} So I prophesied as I had been commanded; and as I prophesied, suddenly there was a noise, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone. {8} I looked, and there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them; but there was no breath in them. {9} Then he said to me, "Prophesy to the breath, prophesy, mortal, and say to the breath: Thus says the LORD GOD: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live." {10} I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood on their feet, a vast multitude.

{11} Then he said to me, "Mortal, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, 'Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are cut off completely.'" {12} Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the LORD GOD: I am going to open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people; and I will bring you back to the land of Israel. {13} And you shall know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people. {14} I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you on your own soil; then you shall know that I, the LORD, have spoken and will act, says the LORD."

DISCUSSION GUIDANCE AND QUESTIONS:

For an overview of Ezekiel 1-33 consider watching: <https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/ezekiel-1-33/>
For an overview of Ezekiel 34-48 consider watching: <https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/ezekiel-34-48/>

1. Open (*or have someone in the group open*) with a prayer inviting the work of the Holy Spirit to open up the hearts and lives of any and all to shape believers into more fully devoted following of Christ.
2. Read (*or have one or more persons read*) the passage printed above (*or from a bible*).
3. Having listened or read this unusual account, where were you drawn into the passage? What images, words or phrases captured your attention and impacted you at a deeper level? Reflect or discuss these.

4. NOTES: The prophecies of Ezekiel are both fascinating and puzzling as they come in a multitude of forms: signs, visions, allegories, etc... Bizarre imagery is also on the table for Ezekiel inspiring fear, awe, and wonder. Easily lost in these words, the central issues or questions addressed are of God's abandonment of Jerusalem and the temple, the peoples' suffering and its purpose, and how the people are to understand their tragic history. These questions arise during the period of the exile in Babylon which forms the historical context for this major prophet of the Old Testament. Ezekiel, himself an exile in Babylon, addresses those expatriates and those who remained behind.
5. What emotional reactions dominate your impressions of this text?
 - a. Awe, confusion, fear
 - b. Hope, inspiration, optimism
 - c. Conviction, transformation, re-imagination
 - d. Others: _____
6. Part of the plight for the exiles was trying to reconcile, theologically, as it were, the destruction of Jerusalem and where the people stood in relationship with God. Can you identify times or theological understandings of the character and nature of God that seem to stand in sharp contrast to one's human experience and story?
7. This "two step" prophecy of Ezekiel - bones coming together with sinew and flesh in 37:7, followed by breath entering into these lifeless forms bringing them to life - harkens back to the creation story in the forming of humanity and the subsequent breath being breathed into them. What connections, if any, might be implied (Note: "ruah" is the Hebrew word used which translates breath, wind, or spirit) with these exiles and the creation story in Genesis?
8. It is not difficult to imagine the despair, defeat, and even the confusion regarding God's hand in the exile's current plight. How could this message and vision be interpreted and understood by the exiles?
9. Where, if willing to go there, do you know of any experience or season of life similar - where you were in need of this sort of life-infusing news? Put another way, do you know of the valley full of dry bones? (37:1-2) What was that period like for you?
10. How do promise and hope find residence in your faith life? or God's provision?
11. Following (or discipleship) can involve embracing stories. Jesus often spoke in story (parables, as an example). How is this story/vision/prophecy able to shape discipleship for you?
12. Spend some time talking or reflecting upon how "story" plays a role in discipleship. If willing, share (*or personally identify within yourself*) how this account - or some other biblical story - impacts your following of Christ.
13. Can you identify any particular ways your Christian faith and following might be inspired to change in light of this passage from the Bible (and any discussion and/or reflection that may have taken place)?
14. (*Optional*) Read the passage once more. Then, take some time to close (or have someone close) with a prayer.