

“The Church on the New Covenant” (Ezekiel 36:25-28; 37:1-10)

We’re in a series “Living in the in-between.” We are actually living in the unique period, which is the time after Jesus’s cross and resurrection, and before his second coming. We looked at three key themes of the Bible: Christ, Kingdom and Covenant, which help us to see what kind of season we are in.

And the last time we unpacked the mystery of Christ. “The mystery is the gospel of grace that the Gentiles are here together with Israel, they are one body, sharing together in the promise of Christ. (Ephesians 3:6)”

And through his church God declares Jesus is the Lord of all to spiritual forces by demonstrating the unity in diversity in the name of Jesus. Through his church, God breaks down the ruling power of spiritual forces by bringing together people from different places and transforming lives in the name of Jesus. In other words, we are in the spiritual warfare.

So we are told, “Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. (Ephesians 6:10)”

We cannot fight against spiritual forces by human strength, nor can we protect ourselves from spiritual attacks from our enemies. But we can fight against spiritual forces by God’s power, and only when we stand in the Lord, we are safe.

So Paul continues: “Put on all of God's armor so that you will be able to stand firm against all strategies and tricks of the Devil. (Ephesians 6:11 NLT)”

The full armor of God is the uniform of the church, which forms the characteristics of the church, that is truth, righteousness, peace, faith, salvation, the Word of God and prayer in the Holy Spirit.

Today I will connect the church which is us with the new covenant.

1. The New Covenant

Ezekiel 36:25-28

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. ²⁶ 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. ²⁷ And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be

careful to keep my laws. ²⁸ You will live in the land I gave your forefathers; you will be my people, and I will be your God.

This passage describes about the new covenant which is shown at Jeremiah 31. Let's check it out before we move on.

Jeremiah 31:31, 33

"The time is coming," declares the Lord, "when I will make a *new covenant* with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. ³³ "This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time," declares the Lord. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.

So what does the new covenant talk about?

What God is saying here is this. "I will give a new heart to those who were bound by sin. I will remove from them their stubbornness and their refusal of me, and their pride and reliance on themselves. My Words will be as their own thoughts, and their lives will overflow with righteousness and love. Through them, my Word will come true, and My will will be fulfilled. As people in my kingdom, they will praise Me and worship Me through everything, and glorify Me by whatever they do. I will cover them with my Spirit who is truth and love as those who belong to me, and as I redeemed them I will keep them in my glory and victory forever."

What a wonderful promise! But no doubt Ezekiel could hardly believe it! In his days, people of Israel were totally corrupt. While they served their idols and continued to live in sin, they still believed they were righteous because they had the Law and performed ceremonies.

"So they come pretending to be sincere and sit before you listening. But they have no intention of doing what I tell them. They express love with their mouths, but their hearts seek only after money. (Eze 33:31 NLT)"

Nothing had been changed since the time they were in Egypt. God said to Israelites when He was about to save them from Egypt. "Then I said to them, 'Each of you, get rid of your idols. Do not defile yourselves with the Egyptian gods, for I am the LORD your God.' "But they rebelled against me and would not listen. They did not get rid of their idols or forsake the gods of Egypt." (Eze 20:7-8 NLT)

But God, who is merciful, didn't destroy them, but saved them from Egypt. And He gave them the Ten Commandments in the desert on their way to the promised land. But even after that, Israel continued to despise God.

They entered the promised land and possessed the land. It was God who gave them all these things. But Israel rejected God and asked for a king like other nations (1 Samuel 8:6). God didn't destroy them, and gave them a king. Even after it became a kingdom, Israel continued in its corruption. Actually it was getting worse and worse.

God spoke to his people through the prophet Jeremiah. "Do you really think you can steal, murder, commit adultery, lie, and worship Baal and all those other new gods of yours, ¹⁰ and then come here and stand before me in my Temple and chant, "We are safe!"-- only to go right back to all those evils again? ¹¹ Do you think this Temple, which honors my name, is a den of thieves? I see all the evil going on there, says the LORD. (Jer 7:9-11 NLT)"

In the time of King Jehoiakim, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon attacked Jerusalem (2 Chro 36:5-7). At 586 BC, Jerusalem had finally fallen. When Ezekiel heard this news, it was twelfth year of their exile in Babylon (Eze 33:21).

At a situation like this, Ezekiel again heard from the Lord about this new covenant. He had heard this Word from the Lord before (Eze 11:19-20). And he told the exiles everything the Lord had shown him (Eze 11:25). But, after that the situation became worse as we just looked. Jerusalem was destroyed. In a dangerous situation like that, the Lord spoke to Ezekiel this covenant again.

2. New Living

It was an unbelievable word, because Israel was totally corrupted, and the promise of God was too good to believe. So, the Lord gave Ezekiel a vision and made him experience his mighty work in the vision so that he would know the Lord himself would carry out the new covenant.

Ezekiel 37:1-3

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. ² 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. ³ He asked me, "Son of man, can these bones live?" I said, "O Sovereign LORD, you alone know."

God had brought Ezekiel out in a vision. And it was in the middle of a valley, filled with bones. Led by the Lord, Ezekiel looked all around him. All he could see was a great many bones that were very dry.

This very sight illustrated the state of Israel. All he could see were bones, and nothing else. There was no life, no strength, and no hope at all.

The bones were very dry. This indicates it's been quite a while since they died. They lost life, and no one did anything for them, and they were left there. There is no hope of recovery, nothing can be done for them. They have been given up, forgotten, and left behind for long time.

Ezekiel was asked, "Son of man, can these bones live?" If you look at the situation, of course you would know the answer. These bones cannot live!

Then, why did the Lord ask such an obvious question? What was His intent to ask this question? Through this question, Ezekiel's focus moved from the dry bones filled up the valley to the Lord Himself.

He said, "O Sovereign LORD, you alone know."

Ezekiel didn't presume by himself what the Lord was going to do with the dry bones. He was confident that God knows it. He couldn't have hope in the situation, but he had hope in God. Because his God was the Sovereign LORD.

Ezekiel 37:4-6

Then he said to me, "Prophecy to these bones and say to them, 'Dry bones, hear the word of the LORD! ⁵ This is what the Sovereign LORD says to these bones: I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life. ⁶ 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 hoped in the Lord. Then, the Lord gave him his Word, and told him to speak to the dry bones. Logically looking at this, it sounds absurd. These are bones, bones that are very dry! Speak to the bones? That itself is a crazy idea! Moreover, what the Lord had told him was that He will make those bones humans again and they will come to life.

Ezekiel could prophesy these words only by faith in God. The faith he had was that what he was speaking was the Word of God which had supernatural power. And he had faith that he can act on this faith, standing on the covenant of God.

Ezekiel 37:7-8

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. ⁸ I looked, and tendons and flesh appeared on them and skin covered them, but there was no breath in them.

He carried out what looks absurd in human eyes because of his faith in God. He totally obeyed God. Faith is completed by action. Faith without action is dead (James 2:22, 26).

He spoke these Words of God in many different directions. As he was speaking, a rattling sound began. The sound of the bones coming together. They started to connect to one another, and they formed human shapes. And tendons and flesh appeared on them and skin covered them. And human shapes appeared there.

Remember there were so many bones. The valley was filled with bones as far as the eye could see. It is difficult enough to put together one person's bones correctly. But here are so many bones of so many people. The bones on the right hand cannot be mistaken with the bones on the left hand. And of course, if two peoples' bones are mixed by mistake, this will cause disaster. When God does his works, He will put everything together perfectly.

Each person's bones were not only correctly put together, but also tendons and flesh appeared on them and skin covered them. They were ready to move. But there was no life in them. No matter how prepared a human form can seem, if it doesn't have the breath of God, if it is not filled with the Holy Spirit and breathing, it is as good as dead. No matter how strong your muscle is and how beautiful you look, if you are not filled with the Holy Spirit, and walk by the Spirit, you are as good as dead in sin.

When Ezekiel saw this spectacular sight, he must have been amazed, but the same time he may have been disappointed. The bones were put together, and they became human forms. And many of them! What a wonderful thing! However, they are not breathing. They are as good as dead.

Sometimes we may be disappointed. Someone believed in Jesus, and became a Christian. But nothing seems to have changed. Does the Word of God have no effect?

God continued to spoke to Ezekiel.

Ezekiel 37:9-10

Then he said to me, "Prophecy 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.' " 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.

He boldly spoke to the Holy Spirit. Standing on God's covenant, he declared that God the Holy Spirit would fulfill the covenant in His name.

Suddenly, a vast army of people stood up on their feet. They were all alive and breathing. The Holy Spirit filled all these dead bodies with life, and now they were prepared for battles. In an instant, they were brought into a total joy and blessing of the new covenant.

God made the lifeless bones alive again. Even if people fall into a state of lifelessness like dry bones, the Lord can transform them anew. But they still cannot move. These forms were powerless, unable to fulfill all the purposes of life, until they were given the breath, filled with the Spirit of God.

God the Holy Spirit became their life, filled them, and they started to have a mind of Christ, and was led to live according to the Lord's will.

They would only start to live in the Word of God when the Holy Spirit is poured into them and starts to work in them. They were scattered in pieces when they were dead, but once they were filled with the Holy Spirit, they started to move as one unit.

In this vision, Ezekiel first declared the Word of God to the dead dry bones. And he saw God's wonderful work of regeneration. But it wasn't enough. It needed the work of the Holy Spirit. He was told to prophesy and pray to the Holy Spirit boldly. He cried out to Him that the Holy Spirit will be pour out into them as The Lord promised.

To prophesy to the Holy Spirit is to pray to God, standing upon His Word. How do we pray usually? We pray in the name of the Son, Jesus and pray to God the Father. What Ezekiel did is similar to this.

Ezekiel didn't demand what he wanted from God arrogantly. He was commanded by God to stand on the new covenant, and ask God the Holy Spirit to fulfill the covenant. And he did it by faith.

By God's Word, we can be transformed anew. This is a work of God. And a person can be filled with the Holy Spirit and be able to live God's will mightily. This is also a work of God. But God will do it together with us. This can be done in our lives, when we cooperate with God.

Ezekiel obeyed the Lord, and boldly spoke the Word of God. The Holy Spirit worked together with the Word of God. God revived the dead dry bones. And they stood up on their feet as an army of God.

Those bones weren't revived just to become a disorganized crowd, or for each person to go their own way. They became an army, an exceedingly great one. They were revived in order to live out the orders of the one who revived them. They would go advance his name, for his glory.

3. Come, Holy Spirit

When the Word of God become one with the Holy Spirit and work within us, there will be a great revival. This will not happen if we lack either one of them. We need both the Word of God and the Holy Spirit. And through our faith and obedience to God, the Word of God and the Holy Spirit come to us and work within us. Then we will experience the revival of the Lord.

God also brought us, spiritual Israel, church into the same covenant in Jesus. "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. (Eze 36:26-27 NLT)"

This is the new covenant God has given Israel, and the covenant God made with us through Christ. God signed the covenant by the cross of Jesus. Therefore this covenant will never be changed, nor cancelled. It will be surely fulfilled.

Why did God make this new covenant with Israel which was totally corrupted? What is the reason why God did this for us? It is because of His Holy name. And by doing this for Israel and for us, He is revealing to the nations that He is the Lord.

“I am doing it to protect my holy name, which you dishonored while you were scattered among the nations. I will show how holy my great name is-- the name you dishonored among the nations. And when I reveal my holiness through you before their very eyes, says the Sovereign LORD, then the nations will know that I am the LORD. (Eze 36:22-23 NLT)”

It is because of His Holy name that the Lord will give us the Holy Spirit. So we can boldly ask Him. It is because of His Holy name that the Lord fills us with the Holy Spirit. So we don't have to hesitate to ask Him. Actually not asking will offend the Lord's holy name. We are commanded to ask.

God commands us to ask for the Holy Spirit to come and fill us, and we are encouraged to pray in the name of Jesus, standing on His Word.

“You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it. "If you love me, you will obey what I command. (John 14:14-15)” What is the commandment? To ask Holy Spirit to come and fill us.

“And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever-- the Spirit of truth. (John 14:14-17)”

“Ask and it will be given to you. how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him! (Luke 11:9, 13)”

Let's join our hearts in prayer, “Come, Holy Spirit, come with all your mighty power; come from the four winds, O breathe into me, breathe into us!” Let winds come from every direction. Let the Holy Spirit move as He wills to do in us. Let Him come from north, south, east and west. Say, “Come, all four winds, O breathe into us! Just come.”

For Lifenet groups and personal reflections

1. Ezekiel 36:25-28 shows the new covenant God had given to Israel. Which part of the covenant do you want to be real in your life most?

2. God had brought Ezekiel out in a vision. And it was in the middle of a valley, filled with dry bones (Eze 37:1-2). What situation in your life and in the society may this vision represent?

3. What would be your answer if you were asked, "Son of man, can these bones live?" (Eze 37:3) What would you think about regarding this question?

4. What words did Ezekiel receive from God? (Eze 37:4-6, 9)

- He could prophesy these words only by faith in God. Talk about the faith Ezekiel had.

- What can you learn about faith here? (cf. James 2:17; Phi 2:16)

5. God commands us and encourages us to pray and ask for the Holy Spirit to come and fill us. How will you respond? What may hinder you to obey this? How will you overcome the hindrance?