

# Deliverance From Babylon

*3-Year Bible Reading Plan*

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This morning, I want to encourage you to turn to one of the "iconic" passages in the Bible, the book of Ezekiel 37. Now if you're a guest or a visitor with us, when we say the book Ezekiel, we usually don't think iconic, typically we think some type of mystical vision, prophetic utterances, confusing and difficult passages, but today in chapter 37, we're going to come to one of those passages in the Bible that we may not have even realized was in the book of Ezekiel, it's one that most of us are most likely familiar with simply because for years and years there was a children's song that went alongside of it.

As you're turning to Ezekiel 37, just kind of a little reminder of how we got to where we are today. The Jewish individuals, the Israelites of days gone by, they ignored the voice of the prophets and the priests and specifically the voice of the Lord and they found themselves in a place known as Babylon. It was a place that was very unfamiliar to them. The language was different. The culture was different. But more importantly, their opportunity to worship in a free spirit was greatly hindered and at times persecuted. And though we've been walking through Ezekiel these past weeks and we've looked at some of the visions and the prophetic utterances, it is that parallel with Babylon that we've naturally gravitated. Why? Because we see in what they were living in the world that you and I find ourselves in today. As a believer in Jesus Christ, you are hard-pressed not to feel that you have been marginalized and isolated in our modern-day Babylon. The language is different. The culture is different. And the freedom and opportunity of expression of faith is not only becoming less and less of an opportunity, but becoming more and more pushed against and even persecuted. We discover that the world they were walking in is the same world that you and I are in today.

So today, we've spent a lot of time talking about what Babylon looks like and we'll refresh that in just a moment in brief, but I want to talk about what does it look like to be delivered from Babylon. What does it look like to have the Lord deliver you or remove you from the shackles and the bondage of Babylon. Now before we read chapter 37, let me give you a very important reminder, that to be delivered and removed is not necessarily indicative of your current physical environment or situation. In other words, you can be as the Apostle Paul was in Acts 16, you can be shackled in the inner sanctum of prison and be more free than those that are walking out in the open streets. So today, when we talk about being delivered from Babylon, I want you to hear me clearly, the

Lord is not promising that he will physically remove us from the environment that we're in but he is promising that he will spiritually deliver us from that which we discover our lives to be entangled with.

Here in Ezekiel 37 beginning in verse 1, the famous iconic passage of the valley of dry bones. It says,

1 The hand of the LORD was upon me, and carried me out in the spirit of the LORD, and set me down in the midst of the valley which was full of bones, 2 And caused me to pass by them round about: and, behold, there were very many in the open valley; and, lo, they were very dry. 3 And he said unto me, Son of man, can these bones live? And I answered, O Lord GOD, thou knowest. 4 Again he said unto me, Prophecy upon these bones, and say unto them, O ye dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. 5 Thus saith the Lord GOD unto these bones; Behold, I will cause breath to enter into you, and ye shall live: 6 And I will lay sinews upon you, and will bring up flesh upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and ye shall live; and ye shall know that I am the LORD. 7 So I prophesied as I was commanded: and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and behold a shaking, and the bones came together, bone to his bone. 8 And when I beheld, lo, the sinews and the flesh came up upon them, and the skin covered them above: but there was no breath in them. 9 Then said he unto me, Prophecy unto the wind, prophesy, son of man, and say to the wind, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live. 10 So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood up upon their feet, an exceeding great army. 11 Then he said unto me, Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel: behold, they say, Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost: we are cut off for our parts. 12 Therefore prophesy and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, O my people, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel.

Now before you and I walk through this passage for its application for us today, you may or may not realize but we find ourselves in the middle of two very important biblical concepts and ideas. For days gone past, the words that Ezekiel was giving the people of God was that it was about 50 years until they would return to Jerusalem, about 50 years where they would go with the opportunity to rebuild the temple, to reestablish themselves, that that which appeared to be death today would be breathed into life in just a few years. That was days past. Days future. We cannot ignore the fact that this passage is about what you and I collectively call the second coming. This is the passage of scripture that says there's a day coming where Jesus Christ is physically going to descend, he is going to touch foot on planet earth, and he is going to reign specifically according to the Bible for a thousand years, and as a part of that process, as he's coming he will declare and shout and the bones of those of days gone by will raise from the dead. You

and I find ourselves right between these two incredible historic moments, deliverance of the past and ultimate deliverance of the future.

So what does it look like for you and I today to experience the same kind of deliverance that may not take us to a different land, it may not take us to a new "place" but allows us to experience freedom each and every day and moment of our lives? Kind of as a review, let's remind ourselves of what the problem is. Back in chapter 34 of Ezekiel, the Lord summed it up in the first three verses, he said, "The problem is that the shepherds are not feeding the flock and the flock is eating that which is tainted and spoiled." The Lord begins to extrapolate on that and say, "Here's the problem, those who were commissioned to say thus saith the Lord have started promoting their own opinions, philosophies and personal agendas, and the problem is that we have forgotten that our problem is a sin problem which means it's a spiritual problem." You and I today must be reminded on a daily basis that the problems of this world are inherently spiritual in nature, but we have a tendency, we have a tendency to talk about our problems being politic or economic or sociological or educational, and we love to put a lot of different descriptors on there. Allow me to share with you: those are just manifestations of the real problem. Why are there political problems? Because we've got sin problems. Why are there financial problems? Because we've got sin problems. Why are there sociological problems? Because we've got a sin problem. Do you understand the common thread here? All those things that we love to discuss in public really have a common root and the Lord called it out in chapter 34, he said there is a spiritual vacuum, there is a sin condition that has caused all of this.

You fast forward to chapter 36 right above where we read earlier and the Lord gives an incredible promise. He says beginning in verse 26, notice what he says,

26 A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. 27 And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them. 28 And ye shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; and ye shall be my people, and I will be your God.

I want you to notice what the Bible does not say. God does not promise, "I will give you a new political leader." He does not promise, "I will give you a new form or structure." He does not promise anything of a tangible nature. What is God's promise? The problem that we've got can only be solved with a new heart. And I think that's one of our issues that we have in our culture today, even those of us who would claim to be believers, we think if we get the right people in the right positions, making the right things, that that's going to fix everything. It does no good to replace one stony heart with another stony heart. It doesn't do any good. He says the only way this is going to be solved is if you'll allow me to do a spiritual surgery on your life.

Now one of the favorite movies that Tracy and I enjoy watching together, it's probably one that many of you may have seen, it's one of those movies that though it's been out

for a while, they like to play it late night at times, it's called "The Replacements." I don't know if you're familiar with the movie, it's a football movie and you're probably wondering why would your wife love a football movie so much? Because it's hysterical, is what it is. It is a movie about over-paid, spoiled football players, not that that would ever happen in real life, who want more and they go on strike. For the last four weeks of the season, they call in replacement players. These are the never-was or the could-have-been or the should-have-beens. These are the individuals who never made it to the league. These are the individuals who never caught that big break and for four games they'd have the opportunity to be on a professional football field. You can imagine the humor that goes along with that but kind of the critical character is the quarterback. The quarterback was a former star at Ohio State, had just a debacle of a Sugar Bowl one year and his career just spiraled, never touched foot on a pro football field until the coach came knocking on his boat door, he lived on a boat. He said, "I've got an opportunity for you to return to the game." As he returns to the game, he leads that team to being within one game of going to the playoffs, a team that was out of the playoffs when the paid players were there, now all of a sudden they've got a chance.

Well, as it would happen, the week before that critical game, you guessed it, the quarterback with two Super Bowl rings, the quarterback with multiple MVP championships, the quarterback with a multimillion dollar contract, a fancy car and an agent decided he wanted to come back and play. He returned to the locker room, he returned to the field, and if you've seen the movie, it went sideways quick. There was no connection, there was no relating to each other on the field, and by the time you get to halftime of this critical game, they're not only losing, they're losing bad and it looks hopeless. That quarterback who had regained the opportunity and was back on his boat watching on tv, a sideline reporter comes to the coach at halftime and says, "Coach, what do you need? What do you need in the second half?" He said, "We need heart, miles and miles of heart." It doesn't take a movie buff to realize how the story ends. That quarterback makes his way to the field and they make their way to the playoffs. Two Super Bowl rings, MVP trophies, multimillion dollar contracts, it doesn't mean anything if you don't have heart.

That's what the Lord's saying. Folks, we can have all the plans, we can have all the resumes, we can have everything lined up, we can have everything tangible that we can imagine, God says, "You know what that is? That's just perfuming the proverbial pig, is all it is." You've got to have heart. So hear me clearly: what we're about to talk about with deliverance cannot and does not happen unless the Lord has given you a new heart. All the education, all the finances, all the resources in the world will not get it done. So if we truly want deliverance from Babylon, if we truly want to see God do a work in our lives, it's not going to be that which oftentimes can physically be tangible that we can grab ahold of.

So what's the process? This is where chapter 37 comes in. What is the process by which God applies this to our life? Notice what it says in verse 1, it says, "He carried me away." Isn't that an interesting picture? It reminds me of the Apostle John in Revelation 4 in the midst of all these events happening on earth, he is carried up into heaven. It

reminds me of 2 Corinthians 12 when the Apostle Paul says, "I don't know if I was in or out of the body, I just know the Lord caught me up into glory." It reminds me of Elijah, the great prophet, when a chariot of fire comes and takes him up into heaven. Here's the problem, I've just given you the entire roster of everybody that the Lord physically carried away and so you and I are saying, "So why would the Lord say this unto us? Why would he give us this picture?" Because the word "deliverance" means to be taken from one place to another. It means to come out of one location to another location.

You know, a lot of times people come to me and they say, "Pastor, all I really want to know is what is God's will for my life. What does God want for my life." And I've met people whether they're in their teens or they've been here for generations, say, "What does God really want?" Can I put to rest that whole question? In fact, we can quit writing books about it, we can quit having conferences about what's God's will for my life. Galatians 1:4, "This is the will of God," the Bible is about to tell us, "that you might be delivered from this present evil world." That's it. You say, "What is God's will for my life?" He wants you delivered. He wants you taken out of this present evil world. But in John 17, listen to what Jesus said, that final prayer in Gethsemane, he says, "Father, I pray not you would take them out of the world but you would keep them from the evil one." So the picture that we have of deliverance is being carried out, delivered from, or removed from this present evil world. Think of Goshen in the Old Testament, the world falling apart around them and God protecting them even in the midst thereof.

So what is the power by which God does this? Notice what it says in verse 4, "Again he said unto me, Prophesy upon these bones, and say unto them, O ye dry bones, hear the word of the LORD." I don't know about you, but that probably would not have made the top list in a Family Feud game. Y'all watch Family Feud. Families gather together and they try to get the top answers to the question. How is God going to do this? He's just going to say it. You know, in Hebrews 1:3, it says that the entire universe as you and I know it is upheld – listen to this – by his word. He speaks it.

Now as you begin to process here, God gives us this picture of delivering us from what we know as Babylon. He is going to do so by speaking it. You know there's precedence in this, right? There is precedence that when God speaks or when God breathes on something, that which was inanimate comes to life, that which was dead is raised. Allow me to illustrate just within the confines of your Bible. You don't have to get past the second chapter of Genesis and the Lord reaches down and forms like who you and I know as Adam. Now by the way, this is kind of an aside just to make sure you're awake. You do know that the garden of Eden is in Alabama. You say, "It is?" Do you know what the word Adam means? Red clay. Just an idea but nonetheless.... So the Lord reaches down, he forms what we know as Adam, and as he forms him, do you remember what he does? He breathes into him and what happens? The Bible says he becomes a living soul. All God had to do was breathe and life came to that which was lifeless.

You fast forward to what we know as the New Testament. Jesus has fulfilled a 3 ½ year earthly ministry. He's died upon the cross. He's raised from the grave. He's about to ascend on high and the disciples, the apostles, they're gathered up in the Upper Room and

he's told them that the world is going to be turned upside down by them, he tells them there's going to be an incredible influx out there. Do you know what he does? The Bible says he breathes on them and they receive the Holy Spirit. What did they receive? That new heart. They received that new ability, that new power that would give them the wherewithal to actually fulfill being delivered from this present evil world.

You know, that's what happened in your life. If you've ever come to that place in your life where you realized you had a sin problem and you asked Jesus to save you, do you know what he did? He took a dead man walking, he breathed his Holy Spirit into you and you became alive again. You became alive. You see, you were dead in your trespasses and sin but when his Holy Spirit was breathed into you, you became alive.

Now one of the things that's interesting in light of Ezekiel is we talk about being delivered from Babylon, we talk about being carried away or brought out of this cultural moray that we see parallel to the Old Testament, do you know what 2 Timothy 3 says about the word of God? It says that he inspired it and – listen – he breathed it. You ever want God to breathe and make that which is dead come to life? He's given you pages and pages of his breath. You say, "How am I gonna get delivered from this evil world, this present evil world?" I know it sounds rudimentary but forgive me, just do what God said. He breathed and said, "These are my instructions for you." How do you get delivered out of Babylon? You just do what he says. "Well, that put the apostles in prison." Yes, but he also took them out as well.

So we have this incredible process by which the Lord shows us that we are to be delivered from this present evil world according to his word which he has breathed to us and even given his Holy Spirit to join alongside. So simply put, what will it look like? What will the products be? I want you to fast forward to verse 10 of Ezekiel 37. I want you to see what will happen when the Lord breathes on you, when he breathes on us. You'll notice in verse 10, "So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood up upon their feet," notice this interesting description, "an exceeding great army." You may have questioned your "purpose" in life, we've got books out there telling us what our purpose in life is. He says what your purpose is, that when he breathes in you and he brings you to life, you are now a part of his "army."

You know, it's interesting as you go through the New Testament and you begin to read all the passages on what we call spiritual warfare, you know, the belt of truth, breastplate of righteousness, helmet of salvation, the passages about the weapons of our warfare, all these passages about wrestling with the devil, you know that all those passages that give a military feel are all written to people who are believers in Jesus Christ. In other words, when he breathes on us and he gives his word to us, he gives us the purpose, we have been created to be his army, but here's the thing I want you to hear, not an army going out to physically conquer but an army that says, "God, you fight this battle." Remember Zechariah 14? The battle is not yours, it is the Lord's.

So his purpose is to create an army. I know what you're thinking, "Yeah, but if you saw my track record, if you saw the life that I used to live, if you knew my reputation, if people would just tell you the back story, you wouldn't want me in your army." That's the good news, it's not my army, it's his. Go to verse 11. I want you to notice the people that the Lord enlists, the people that he places in his army. He says, "Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel." Now I mentioned earlier this is a very prophetic passage about days that are coming, what we collectively refer to as the second coming, but let's just look in our world today paralleled to Babylon. If you have the Spirit of God within you and you have that which he has breathed, the word of God in front of you, that means that one of the things he has done has put you in his army.

The whole house. Notice he didn't say those that are uniquely qualified. He didn't say those that have this certain skillset, those that have these specific gifts. In fact, speaking of gifts, you get to 1 Corinthians 12, it says it's the Lord who gives the gifts for his honor and for his pleasure.

The whole house. You say, "What does that mean?" You. You say, "But I can only..." Congratulations, you're qualified. The whole house. "But all I have to offer..." You know, I'm reminded of a young lady who went to the feet of Jesus just days before his crucifixion. She said, "All I have to offer is a bottle of perfume. That's all I've got." Remember what Jesus told them? "Her story will be told forever." Lest you think all I've got is this, it may be by the offering of that and by the utilization of that that the Lord uses that story forever.

But I want you to notice the procedure in verse 12, "Therefore prophesy and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, O my people, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel." Now I don't want to scare you but this is where I could camp out for about 2 ½ -3 hours but I promise I won't do that to you. He promised them that they would come out of the graves. Fifty years after Ezekiel gave this message to the people of God, they went back into Jerusalem, they began to rebuild that temple, and according to the biblical record, there wasn't a single person that came out of the grave. Not one. You'd probably be thinking the same thing I'd be thinking, "What was the Lord saying to Ezekiel?" "He said we'd come out of the graves. He said there would be those that were physically dead that would come back to life. Here's Nehemiah and all these guys rebuilding these walls, we sure could use the help. And there's nobody coming out of the graves."

For the next 500 years, the Jewish people would read these scriptures and they would question and they would wonder. In fact, if you've ever been to what we know as the Holy Land or Israel, there on the eastern side of that Temple Mount are just row and row of grave after grave after grave. They're everywhere. The entire hillside is a graveyard. But then there's this little passage in Matthew 27. Matthew 27 talks about that when Jesus died, that when he did so that the veil was torn from the top to the bottom and the earth did quake. Let me remind you, the earthquake did not cause the veil to rip, the veil ripping caused the earth to quake. It talks about his death. I love this next passage. It says when Jesus Christ rose from the dead, many saints of old rose with him and they walked

in the holy city. Folks, I've got news for you, we have precedence that it's been opened up before. The Bible says that one day they're going to open up again. In fact, the Bible says in 1 Thessalonians 4 that those who are dead in Christ, those who are alive in Christ will one day be raised together to meet the Lord together in the air.

So where does that put you? Where does that put me? What's the procedure for our lives? The day I got saved, and by the way, for me it was about 40 years ago, the day that I got saved, I got raised from the dead. Now I may not have looked any different to anybody else around me but according to the Bible I was dead in my sin and trespasses and all of a sudden I'm alive. I was raised from the dead the day I got saved. One day barring the return of Jesus Christ, my body is going to be laid in the ground, he's going to declare with a great shout, and I'm going to be raised from the dead one day in the future. So don't spend a whole lot of money on that stuff because I'm not going to use it for very long. But nonetheless, so I've been raised in the past, I'm going to get raised in the future.

What about tomorrow when the alarm clock goes off? Anybody walking through some death in life? Hopelessness in life? Futility in life? Frustration in life? Well, if Jesus Christ can raise the graves of the Old Testament saints in Matthew and if Jesus Christ is going to open up my grave one day in the future, don't you think that whatever is bringing death in my life today he can raise it from the dead as well? You say, "Well, how is he going to do it?" We just talked about it. He's going to breathe on it.

So here are these famous valley of dry bones. They're historical of days past. They're prophetic of days future. But they are powerful for days present. What was God telling the Israelites to do? What's he instructing us to do today? That if Babylon is creeping in and hopelessness is rising, and death is surrounding, this isn't the time to go to the latest greatest survey and postulating. This is the time to go back to the words of Elijah, the words of Moses, the words of David, the words of Ezekiel, the words of whomever the Lord used, and allow the Lord to speak life into our lives.

In the land of Egypt, there was death all around but there was life in Goshen. The world tells us today just go get a new stony heart. The world tells us today just replace this system with that system. What does the Lord tell us? If you want that which is dead brought to life, if you want that which is futile and hopeless to have hope again, then we need a resurrection and it starts with him raising our dead soul to life. No amount of deeds and works are going to solve this problem. It all starts at the cross.