Coming Alive Again in the LORD and From HIS Holy Spirit

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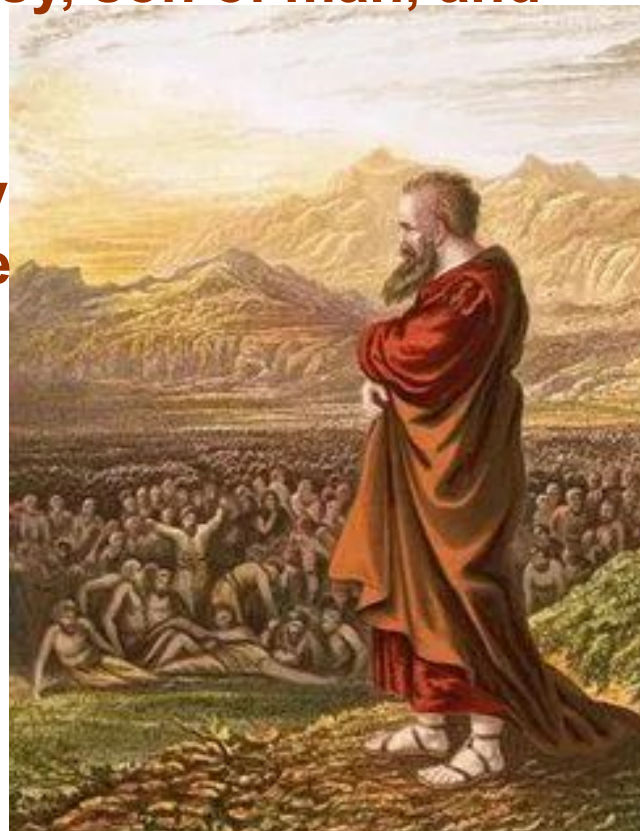
Jeremiah 37:1

“The hand of the LORD came upon me and brought me out in the Spirit of the LORD; and set me down in the midst of a valley; and it was full of bones…….. ”

Jeremiah 37:7-10

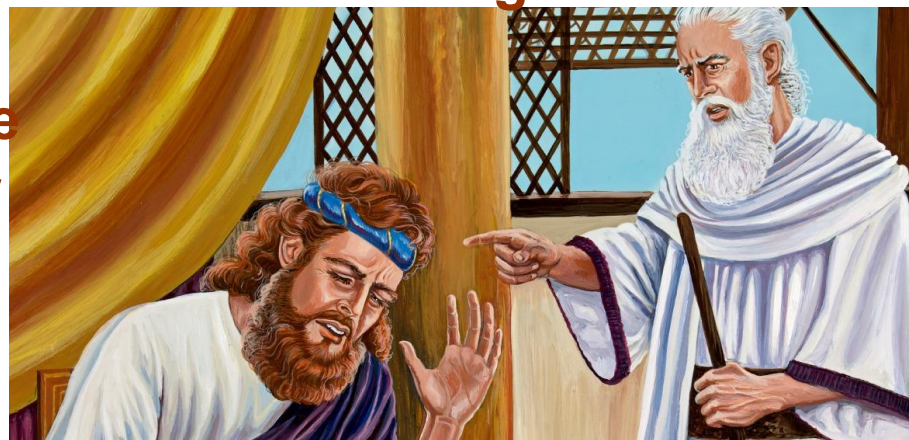
"So I prophesied as I was commanded; and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and suddenly a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to bone.

Indeed, as I looked, the sinews and the flesh came upon them, and the skin covered them over; but there was no breath in them. Then he said to me, 'Prophesy to the breath, prophesy, son of man, and say to the breath: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain, that they may live.' So I prophesied as he commanded me, and breath came into them, and they lived, and stood upon their feet, an exceeding great army."



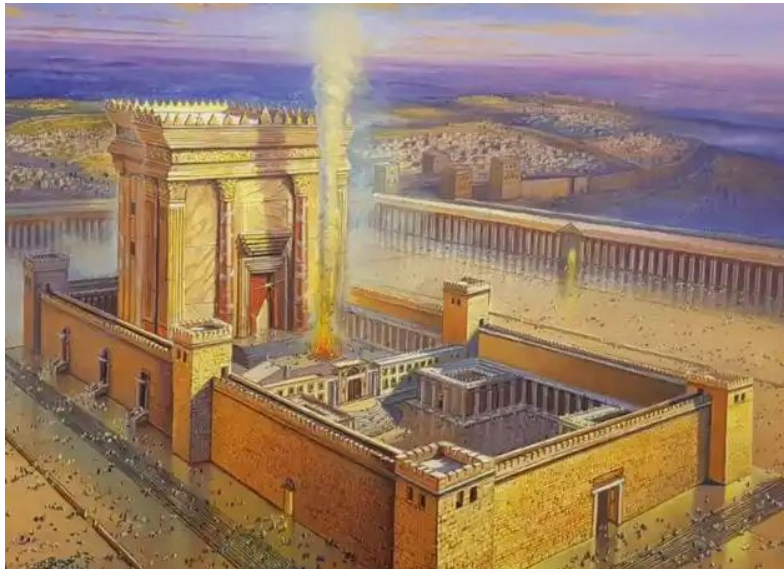
In my sermon for February, based on Jeremiah Chapter 29, I highlighted how difficult and thankless a task it was to be a prophet in Old Testament Israel. These people were "stiff-necked", head-strong, and mostly only wanted prophets to speak words which they wanted to hear. We think of prophets imprisoned, as Jeremiah was, badly treated, and many of them being killed.

There was, occasionally, an exception. Nathan, who was a prophet during the reign of king David, was respected and his words were taken seriously. We have only to remember how, when convicted by Nathan, of his terrible sins, David readily acknowledged his guilt. Under other kings and at other times Nathan would most likely have been sent into exile or executed.



Another exception, at least to some extent, was the prophet Ezekiel. Ezekiel was serving the Lord as a prophet even before the conquest of Judah and the destruction of Jerusalem, by the Babylonians in 587 B.C. In time, too, he was taken into captivity in Babylon. However, in amongst the dire warnings, judgements and promises of punishment he was called by the Lord to deliver, Ezekiel was also called to convey messages of hope.

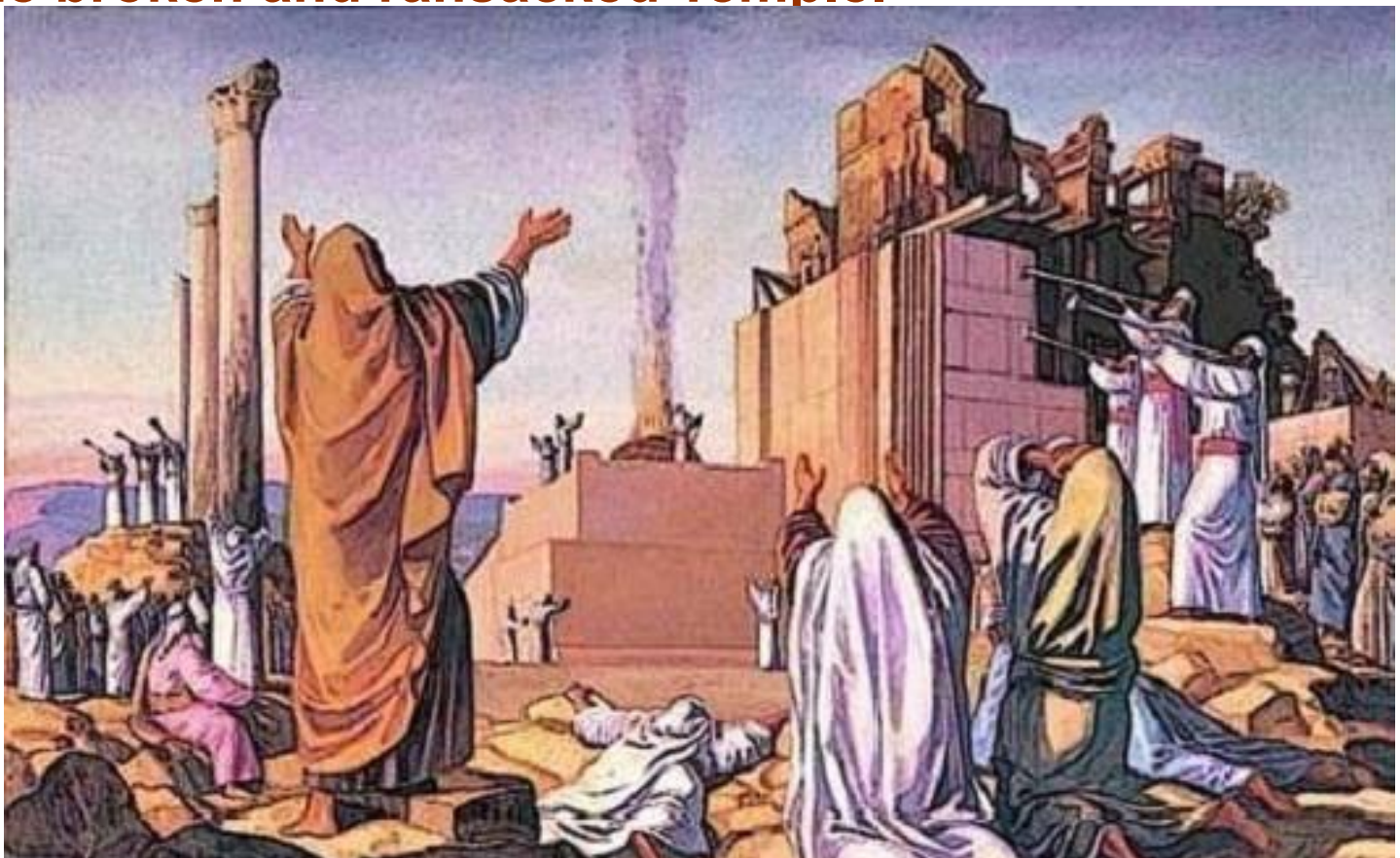
And this is one such message of hope. Another and much longer message of hope is the vision he had and which he was told to share with the captive people of Israel living in Babylon, of a re-built Temple back in Jerusalem, as in Chapter 40 inwards.



The majority of people who had been carried away into captivity in Babylon longed to return to their homeland. They found being in captivity a tremendous hardship. And their pitiful, empty, “dead” state and frame of mind is graphically captured in this vision which Ezekiel saw. A valley full of disconnected bones scattered all over the place. Although it wasn’t literally so, they felt themselves to be dead and lifeless.

The message of hope and encouragement begins in the previous Chapter, Chapter 36. Now, in Chapter 37 it is captured in a picture image. It’s the old story, really, that a picture is worth a thousand words.

God knew that the people in captivity in Babylon had reached the point of despair and that hopelessness was, like a wave, washing over them So he sent this message to revive their spirits and to re-kindle their assurance that one day all this would end and that they would be able to return to their homeland and re-build their lives there and restore the broken and ransacked Temple.



"Then the LORD said to me, 'Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They indeed say, 'Our bones are dry, our hope is lost, and we ourselves are cut off!' Therefore, prophesy and say to them, 'Thus says the LORD GOD: Behold, O my people, I will open your graves and cause you to come up from your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel….I will put My Spirit in you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land." (Verses 11-14)

In unwanted situations in which we find ourselves, hope is incredibly important. The devil, or evil spirits, target hope, to weaken and destroy it, if they can. Because if they can successfully do this a person is easily overcome, by despair, loneliness, grief, shame or whatever it may be that they are going through.

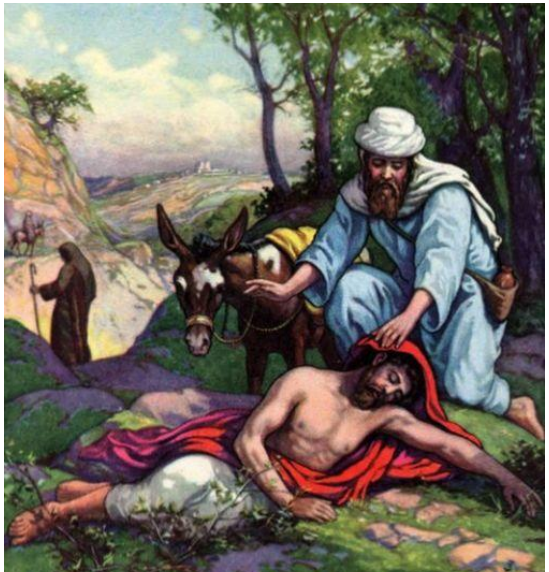
On this very point, I commend to you the following teaching: "Temptations involve feelings of doubt regarding the Lord's presence and mercy, and also regarding His salvation. The evil spirits who are present with people at such times and are the cause of the temptation do all they can to infuse a negative outlook. But good spirits and angels from the Lord in every way disperse that doubting attitude, all the time preserving feelings of hope and, in the end, strengthening an affirmative outlook. Consequently a person undergoing temptation hangs between a negative and an affirmative outlook. People who give way to temptation remain in a doubting, and sink into a negative, frame of mind, whereas people who overcome still experience feelings of doubt; yet they allow themselves to be filled with hope and so remain steadfastly in an affirmative outlook."
(Arcana Caelestia 2338)

Importantly, the Lord's promise to the people of Israel in captivity, anguished over the situation they found themselves in, didn't end there. The Lord continued and promised them, through Ezekiel, that the two little kingdoms, of Judah and Israel, which had come into existence following the death of Solomon, would again be reunited. One nation again, with one king. (Chapter 37:15-28)

It can't be too difficult for any of us today to imagine what this message of hope and reassurance meant to the ancient Israelites. They thought they had been abandoned by God. Here He is telling them, "No, you haven't been abandoned at all."

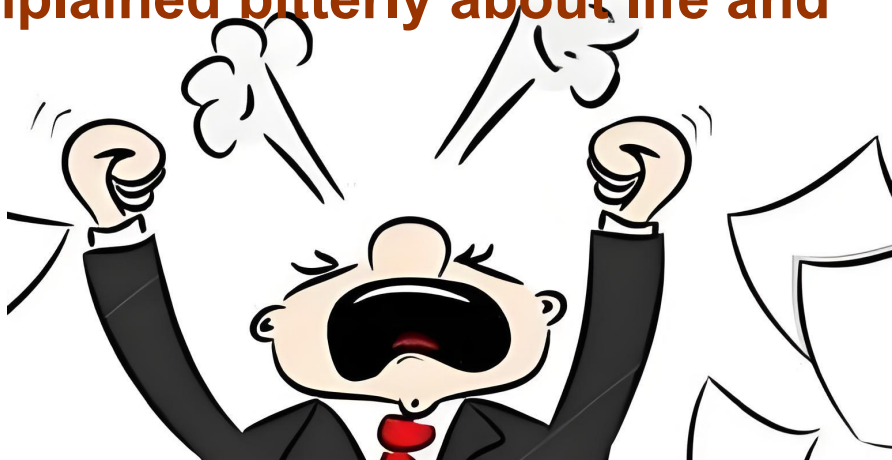
Picture images in the Bible

Earlier I quoted a well known saying that "A picture is worth a thousand words". A picture imprints itself in our minds, and is usually remembered more successfully than the explanation about it. This is why the Word of God in our Bible is so full of picture images. And it is why Jesus continuously **used picture images to embody and convey profound truths and teachings**. Think of His picture image of the Good Samaritan, or of the Sower who went out to sow or of the lost sheep, or of the way He talked about Himself as being "the Door" or "The Vine".



Like we have seen, here in the prophecy of Ezekiel, we have an unforgettable picture image. And it doesn't just depict the ancient people of Israel languishing in captivity in Babylon. This is also about our times - yours and my times - when we are languishing, feeling oppressed and captive and in the grip off what is natural, unregenerate and self-serving.

Can you recognize or recall such times? Times when you have been beset by worries? Times when you have given in to some hellish impulse? Such as when you have lost your temper. Times when you have harbored resentment or jealousy? Times when, perhaps, you have complained bitterly about life and accused God of treating you unfairly?



These are the times which are pictured for us in Ezekiel's vision of the valley of dry bones.

Can you remember how you felt during such times?

◆ You would have been in a valley where there was only shade, and no light (or, very little light) from the Lord was penetrating and reaching you.

◆ The truths you had learned about God were scattered and disconnected, just as the bones were scattered and unconnected.

◆ Indeed, those bones - those truths from the Word and about the Lord which we had been taught - would have seemed absolutely dry and lifeless.

Truths from the Word, like bones, and when connected together, give shape and structure to the spiritual person the Lord urges us to become. But in those very times such as we are talking about, they disconnect and are scattered in all directions.

I once spent time with a young man who had begun an affair with another woman outside of his marriage. He had become a captive of Babylon. The affair, he told me, made him feel good about himself. What was especially sad was that he had been a Church-goer. But as I talked with him I could see that those truths he had learned about living a life as a follower of Jesus were scattered ad disconnected. They had become dry and lifeless.

Clearly, and as his Pastor, my challenge and task was to help this young man, first, to recover and bring back into focus those truths (scattered bones). Then, secondly, to counsel, encourage and support him to repent and, again, apply those truths, live by them and come, again, to love them. For only in this way could the Lord infuse good into them (cover the bone with sinews and flesh), so bringing them back to life once more.

"Dry bones", we read, "stand for the understanding side of (our imperfect, sometimes corrupt lower self and grasp of divine truth and teaching). This is lifeless until it receives the life of good from the Lord." ("Arcana Caelestia"3812)

The Old Testament Israelites had, by this time, had time to repent of their waywardness and sins. Indeed, their repentance was a prerequisite for the promises and reassurances that have been recorded for us in this prophecy of Ezekiel, Chapters 36 and 37.Indeed, it was an absolutely essential step.

Even in our worst times and our times when we feel most distant from the Lord; when we are reaping the consequences of unregenerate desires, thoughts and behaviour, the Lord never leaves us and continues to watch over us. All the while He is wanting us to recognize how desolate and empty and devoid of life from heaven our situation is. And when we do recognize

In the course of repentance those truths which were scattered start to come back together. We begin to see sense and good reason, again, in the truths and teachings from the Word. It is like when we have given way to an outburst of anger and bad temper. Christian truths, such as,

- withholding and forgoing retaliation (Matthew 5:39)
- exercising gentleness and self-control (Galatians 5:23)
- bearing one another's burdens (Galatians 6:2),
- walking in love (Ephesians 5:2)

All of which were scattered in different directions now begin to reconnect and make sense to us once more.

“So I prophesied as I was commanded”, said Ezekiel, “ and as I prophesied there was a noise, and suddenly a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to bone. Indeed, as I looked, the sinews and the flesh came upon them, and the skin covered them over; but there was no breath in them.” (Verses 7 & 8).

When following repentance, and the truths of the Word now reconnecting in our minds, we set the scene for an astonishing and transformative experience. New life from the Lord floods into these truths now reconnected. This is the Lord in His Holy Spirit. The Lord in His Holy Spirit gives us to see familiar truths in a wonderful, new way. They come alive in us as never before. Once again they give shape to our spirit. They enable us to become human again. And in the eyes of the angels we are now seen to be human again.

“The breath of lives and living soul”, we read, “denote spiritual life, for without this soul people are (spiritually) “dead” although they live so far as the body and the senses are concerned. In fact, “soul”, “spirit”, and “wind”, in the Word, all mean spiritual life. In John’s Gospel: “Jesus said to the disciples, ‘Peace be unto you; as the Father has sent me, even so send I you. And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, Receive the Holy Spirit.” (Chapter 20:21,22). By the Lord’s breathing on them and saying, “Receive the Holy Spirit” is meant the same as Jehovah breathing into Adam’s nostrils the breath of lives, which means spiritual life; for the Holy Spirit is Divine Truth proceeding from the Lord, from which arises spiritual life.” (“A[pocalypse Explained 419:4)

Please note this: “The Holy Spirit is Divine Truth proceeding from the Lord, from which arises spiritual life.”

This is not information or learning or truth memorized. The Holy Spirit is Divine Truth with all its power to transform us into re-born people.

Another quotation: "The Divine power and activity meant by the Holy Spirit are, generally speaking, reformation and regeneration, which lead to renewal, quickening, sanctification and justification; and these lead to purification from evils and the forgiveness of sins, and ultimately to salvation." ("True Christian Religion" 142)

This - the Holy Spirit - is the Lord working within us. "I will", He says, "give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you. I will take away the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put my Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep my judgments and do them." (Ezekiel 36:26)

And when the Lord infuses His Holy Spirit, we shall be one again; one kingdom of the Lord. Not head separated from heart; not knowledge of truth separated from the way we actually conduct ourselves and live our lives. But a single, whole, unity and person.

Remember, we all have our desolate, empty, “down in a valley”, times and experiences. Times when we might appear on the outside to be Christian, but within, the truths we know from the Word lie scattered and lifeless. Times when we are being held captive by Babylon. Times when, in reality, we are just going through the motions of being a Christian.

But here is this wonderful message of reassurance. If we look to the Lord these times and experiences will not last. The Lord is ever ready to come to us in His Holy Spirit, and, when He does, a spiritually lifeless inner landscape is totally transformed. Hope is restored. And a surge of new love and affection for the Lord's Teachings, just sitting there in our memories, remote and lifeless, (as it has been) sweeps in and brings them back to life again.

AMEN

Readings:

Ezekiel Chapter 37: 1-14
Ezekiel Chapter 37: 15-19
John Chapter 3:1-8

Divine Love and Wisdom 146

The Divine Love and Wisdom which emanate from the Lord as the Sun and make warmth and light in heaven are the emanating Divine which is the holy Spirit.

Since the actual Divine is present in angels and mortals by means of spiritual warmth and light, when people who are involved in and moved by true elements of divine wisdom and good elements of divine love are thinking affectionately about and from these elements, we say they are growing warm with God…We refer to these same people as enlightened by God as well, because the Lord, through His Divine-Emanating, not only kindles intentionality with spiritual warmth, but also enlightens discernment with spiritual light."

Apocalypse Reealed 875:12,13

"Man is a recipient of life from God….And the life that inflows is the life proceeding from the Lord, which is called the Spirit of God the Holy Spirit in the Word, of which it is said that it enlightens and enlivens, indeed that it operates in the man. This life, however, is varied and modified in accordance with the organization induced on the man by his love and point of view."

THE END