

Dry Bones and God's Promises of Restoration

DARRELL DELANEY

In modern times, when there is conflict, misunderstandings, or situations of behavior that need addressing, we often hear the term *restorative circles*. Restorative circles are an alternative way to resolve issues between parties that do not just want to deal with issues in a punitive way, but in a way that restores relationships back to health. God is the one who originates this concept par excellence. In this episode of *Groundwork*, we will see a God who can finally move toward restoration and hope, and how that brings hope, not only to Israel, but to us as well. Stay tuned.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Welcome to *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee.

DARRELL DELANEY

And I am Darrell Delaney; and Scott, we have been in this series on Ezekiel—this is the fifth part—and we have seen God's magnificent call to Ezekiel. We have seen God using Ezekiel to do object lessons, and we have seen some very harsh words that God is judging Israel with because they have sinned and fallen far away from God.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, it is a grim book in a lot of ways. We move from the great glory of God, but then to the judgment of God on Israel; and we saw right in the middle of this series in episode three, Ezekiel's vision of the glory of God leaving the temple...leaving Jerusalem...leaving Israel; and we noted that the glory of God was promised to return, but never did until Jesus came, and then Jesus was the living temple; but there has been a lot of relentless judgment, but a lot of hope and grace tucked in there; and now, as we conclude the book, we are going to look at a couple of chapters...Ezekiel 37 and 47...that have some very, very great hope-filled imagery in them; and Darrell, I think that Ezekiel...I bet for a lot of people, even faithful church goers...is not generally well known...

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Unless you have listened to this series of *Groundwork*, if you said to somebody: Hey, is there ever a part of the Bible where a biblical figure has to give himself a haircut on the sidewalk? They would say: No; I've never heard of that one. Well, that is Ezekiel; but even if you don't know Ezekiel, you know Ezekiel 37. *Dem bones*, right? From the old spiritual.

DARRELL DELANEY

Oh, yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

The valley of the dry bones.

DARRELL DELANEY

It would be very helpful to pick up the book of Ezekiel and just read the whole book. You can read the whole book in a couple of sittings, or in a little bit of a time; but the whole counsel of God is very important to get the context of what is being said. We have only picked a few chapters in this short series, but I definitely encourage you to read the whole thing in its entirety so you can see what God is really saying in full.

SCOTT HOEZEE

It is forty-eight chapters, but it does present a powerful message, and we have only been able to dip into a bit of it in the five episodes we have had here; but now, let's go to Chapter 37: The hand of the Lord was on 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. ²He 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. ³He asked me, "Son of man, can these bones live?" I said, "Sovereign Lord, you alone know." ⁴Then he said to me, "Prophecy to these bones and say to them, 'Dry bones, hear the word of the Lord! ⁵This is what the Sovereign Lord says to these bones: I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life. ⁶I 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.'" ⁷So 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. ⁸I looked, and tendons and flesh appeared on them and skin covered them, but there was no breath in them. ⁹Then he said to me, "Prophecy to the breath; prophecy, son of man, and say to it, 'This is what the Sovereign Lord says: Come, breath, from the four winds and breathe on these slain, that they may live.'" (And then he goes on in verse 11): ¹¹[Then he 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.' ¹²Therefore, prophecy and say to them: 'This is what the Sovereign Lord says: My people, I am going to open your graves and bring up you up from them; I will bring up back to the land of Israel. ^{13b}Then you, [my people,] will know that I am the Lord. So, that is the first part of the vision of the valley of the dry bones.

DARRELL DELANEY

It is really powerful, Scott, to read this over and over again just to allow God to speak; and the image is powerful to Ezekiel as well as he is describing it. I think metaphorically speaking it is important for us to note that sin in and of itself destroys. So, the dry bones illustration is a metaphor to me of how sin depletes you...deteriorates you...and takes away from you. You even hear verses in the New Testament that talk about the wages of sin being death, and when sin is full-grown it gives birth to death; and that dry bones situation is the state that they are in because they have been running away from God for so long.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, sin brings death...sin brings destruction; and unfortunately, Darrell, in the last century we have been able to visualize this valley of the dry bones, because unfortunately we have seen it in real life, right? We have seen Buchenwald and Auschwitz, and you know, vast fields of dead Jews murdered in the Holocaust. We have seen the killing fields of Cambodia...bones and skulls just stretching out across the valley; terrible scenes from Rwanda years ago. We have seen these scenes of dead bones and dead people; and the human answer to the question, can these bones live, is no.

DARRELL DELANEY

Absolutely not.

SCOTT HOEZEE

No; now, Ezekiel doesn't say no. he says: Only you know, Lord. Because Ezekiel knows these bones are dead and they are dry. He even says they are dry. They have been out here bleaching in the sun for a while. Can they live? No; but O, Sovereign Lord, maybe you can do something; and then Ezekiel sees the vision that he does.

DARRELL DELANEY

And that brings me to the second point, Scott. There is a miraculous intervention that God can do to bring dead bones back to life, and he does that in this prophetic vision; he does it in the lives of the Israelites; he does it in the lives of us; and as a pastor...as one who used to preach every Sunday...we literally could see what God has done in peoples' lives when the Word is being preached; and then when people pick up the Word at home and they study it, they can feel something happening in their hearts because God is bringing something alive in them, based on the Word; and I have seen that in very, very many examples.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And wouldn't the special effects people in Hollywood have a good time using a little CGI to do this scene of the bones starting to rattle and knocking around the bones, and all of a sudden, bone to bone, and then muscles start coming in, and then the skin comes in, and eyeballs reappear. It could almost be a little grotesque actually. It might gross some people out. This is a miracle that maybe we could reproduce in CGI special effects in a Hollywood movie, but only God can make it happen for real...

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And the key here is a hark back to Genesis. What does God do when he makes Adam? He *huh*...

DARRELL DELANEY

He breathes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

He breathes into him, and that is what gives Adam life; and here he *huh*...he puts the breath back in the skeletons, and once that happens, they come alive. Only God can do this.

DARRELL DELANEY

And he does it for his glory. We represent God everywhere we go, and we represent Jesus everywhere we go; and when we are sinning, we are taking his name through the mud; but he is actually bringing restoration to Israel to bring his name out of the mud...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, he is actually going to bring glory to his name, and he is going to restore it so that he may get honor; and only God can help us and bring us back from being beyond repair because our sinful nature literally destroys us to the point where we cannot live. So, he needs to be the resurrection and the life in our lives; and we will see in the next segment how God continues to encourage Israel. So, stay tuned.

Segment 2

SCOTT HOEZEE

I am Scott Hoezee, along with Darrell Delaney, and you are listening to *Groundwork*; and we are in Ezekiel 37, Darrell. The best known chapter...maybe the only known chapter to a lot of people...from the biblical book of Ezekiel: the valley of the dry bones. You know, people sometimes say: Are there previews of Jesus' resurrection from the dead in the Old Testament? There isn't really a lot...

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

There are a few things, you know, like from Job where he says, you know, he will restore me...he will raise me back; in my own flesh I will see God. There is a reference in Daniel that makes reference that sounds like a resurrection; and certainly, in Ezekiel 37, when God says: I am going to open your graves and bring you back, that is resurrection. That ultimately, of course, comes to its fulfillment in Jesus Christ; but there is some more stuff in Ezekiel 37 that is maybe a little less known than the bones part, and we want to look at that, too.

DARRELL DELANEY

Starting in verse 15: The word of the Lord came to me: ¹⁶“Son of man, take a stick of wood and write on it, ‘Belonging to Judah and the Israelites associated with him.’ Then take another stick of wood, and write on it, ‘Belonging to Joseph (that is, Ephraim) and all the Israelites associated with him.’ ¹⁷Join them together into one stick so that they will become one in your hand. ¹⁸When your people ask you, ‘Won’t you tell us what you mean by this?’ ¹⁹say to them, ‘This is what the Sovereign Lord says: I am going to take the stick of Joseph—which is in Ephraim’s hand—and of the Israelite tribes associated with him, and join it to Judah’s stick. I will make them into a single stick of wood and they will become one in my hand. ²⁰Hold before their eyes the sticks you have written on 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. ²²I 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. ²³They will no longer defile themselves with their idols and vile images or with any of their offenses, for I will save them from all their sinful backsliding, and I will cleanse them. They will be my people, and I will be their God.”

SCOTT HOEZEE

So again, another promise of restoration, and an interesting one here because we have noted in this series, Darrell, that the kingdom of Israel after Solomon split...there were ten tribes associated with what we call the northern kingdom, and then two tribes in what we call collectively Judah...the ten tribes in the northern kingdom were wiped out by the Assyrians, and basically kind of never heard from again...

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Whatever happened to the ten tribes after the Assyrians went through, they just seemed to disappear. Judah continued on for a bit longer before Babylon conquered them and then took the people into captivity; but here God says that somehow he is going to get all twelve tribes back together...and we’ve got two sticks, one representing the northern kingdom and one representing the southern kingdom, and God says...sort of like a magic trick...put them together and make one stick, and that is going to be the united Israel...a promise of strong restoration.

DARRELL DELANEY

And for the Israelite that is on his way to exile, that is big news. For the Israelite who is sitting out in exile, that is big news: you mean to tell me we are going to be as strong as we were before when King David and King Solomon were leading, and we are going to have one big nation? That is a word of hope in the middle of a desolate situation. Things like these cannot happen unless God intervenes. This whole vision of how God brings the breath in to bring Israel back alive and how he is going to miraculously bring these two countries back together is going to happen because God intervened; and I think about intervention. There used to be a show called *Intervention* that I used to love watching, where there is this family member who is destroying themselves. They are going in the way of maybe addiction of some sort. They are destroying and hurting their own lives and they are hurting the family members around them. So, the family members would actually have an intervention meeting where they would confront this loved one and say: Hey, you are hurting yourself. We want to stop you. We are trying to help you here, and we need to intervene so that you don’t go down this path any further. That is exactly what God does in the history of Israel. He does it in the

hearts and the lives of our lives, because if we didn't get an intervention from God, we would definitely continue on the road to sin as well.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And of course, the people will, somewhat understandably, take this eventually rather literally and politically. Ultimately, this is going to happen through Jesus, of course, who will be the new Israel; and now the Church is the new Israel. So, you really don't ever get a political Israel back, but God doesn't need to get a political Israel back to fulfill the promise of these two sticks becoming one stick; and in fact, God goes on in Ezekiel 37:24: 'My servant David will be king over them, and they will all have one shepherd. They will follow my laws and be careful to keep my decrees. ²⁵They will live in the land I gave to my servant Jacob, the land where your ancestors lived. They and their children and their children's children will live there forever, and David my servant will be their prince forever. ²⁶I will make a covenant of peace with them; it will be an everlasting covenant. I will establish them and increase their numbers, and I will put my sanctuary among them forever. ²⁷My dwelling place will be with them; I will be their God, and they will be my people. ²⁸Then the nations will know that I the Lord made Israel holy, when my sanctuary is among them forever.' So, obviously this isn't the literal David. I cannot imagine anybody thought. David is long dead and buried, right? You can visit his tomb. This is the Messiah—this is the messianic David—this is the heir of David that God promised all the way back *when* David was still alive. Somebody in the line of David would sit on the throne of Israel forever, and now this is Israel through the ultimate son of David, Jesus, is expanded to include all people.

DARRELL DELANEY

And you know, Israel heard this loud and clear. So, whenever they had somebody who was rising up to prominence they were like: Is this the one?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Could this be the one?

DARRELL DELANEY

Is this the person? Even when Jesus was here, the disciples were asking him: Is this the time you are going to restore Israel? Because they were still looking for David and Solomon 2.0; but actually, the kingdom that he has...that Christ has...is not of this world; and the way he brought in the kingdom...inaugurated the kingdom...it is the spiritual way he did it. It affected the hearts and the minds of the people. I really love the fact that God knows our situation would be completely hopeless if he didn't intervene into it and help us out.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And the fact that the restoration took a different shape than the people might have thought is not a bad thing; it is a good thing, because this is how God has built a new spiritual house in the Church, which is the body of Christ. This is how God has fulfilled the promise to Abraham, that through Israel, all the nations of the earth would one day be blessed. God was never thinking small...

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

He had to start small with just Abram and Sarai...this childless couple. Sure, he started small, he started with Israel; and you know, Israel, even in its heyday, was no Egypt. It was no Phoenicia...no Babylon. Israel was always kind of a middling-sized nation, even in the ancient Near East, but that is okay; and even when Jesus comes, it is like talk about starting small: A kid born in a barn?

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

To two impoverished parents? This is the hope of the universe? But yes, it is...it is. God starts small, but build something big; and in fact, Darrell, in just a minute we are going to turn to Ezekiel 47, and we will see an exact image of God starting small and then getting big very fast. So, stay tuned.

Segment 3

DARRELL DELANEY

You are listening to *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Darrell Delaney.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee; and we are now going to go ahead. We have been looking at Ezekiel 37; again, the best known chapter in Ezekiel to most people: the valley of the dry bones; but also, as we saw, lesser known, where God has the symbol of the two sticks becoming one stick of a restored Israel, and we know that that is going to be ultimately fulfilled in Jesus; but now lets go, Darrell, to Ezekiel 47, the second to the last chapter of the book, where God gives Ezekiel a very interesting vision centered on the temple...a new temple in a new Jerusalem.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, picking it up at the first verse of Chapter 47; it says: The man brought me back to the entrance to the temple, and I saw water coming out from under the threshold of the temple toward the east (for the temple faced east). The water was coming down from under the south side of the temple, south of the altar. ²He then brought me out through the north gate and led me around the outside to the outer gate facing east, and the water was trickling from the south side. ³As the man went eastward with a measuring line in his hand, he measured off a thousand cubits and then led me through water that was ankle deep. ⁴He measured off another thousand cubits and led me through water that was knee deep. He measured off another thousand and led me through water that was up to the waist. ⁵He measured off another thousand, but now it was a river that I could not cross, because the water had risen and was deep enough to swim in—a river that no one could cross. ⁶He asked me, “Son of man, do you see this?”

SCOTT HOEZEE

Then he led me back to the bank of the river. ⁷When I arrived there, I saw a great number of trees on each side of the river. ⁸He said to me, “This water flows toward the eastern region and goes down into the Arabah, where it enters the Dead Sea. When it empties into the sea, the salty water there becomes fresh. ⁹Swarms of living creatures will live wherever the river flows. There will be large numbers of fish, because this water flows there and makes the salt water fresh; so where the river flows everything will live. (Then jumping down to verse 13): This is what the Sovereign Lord says: “These are the boundaries of the land that you will divide among the twelve tribes of Israel as their inheritance, with two portions for Joseph. ¹⁴You are to divide it equally among them. Because I swore with uplifted hand to give it to your ancestors, this land will become your inheritance.

So, an interesting vision, Darrell, of the new temple in the future, in a new Jerusalem that God has shown to Ezekiel, right at the end of Ezekiel—right at the end of the book; and we started with a trickle...

DARRELL DELANEY

Oh, yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Just a little trickle, like a drinking fountain...just a little trickle of water, and it doesn't look like much; but the next thing you know, it is like it has become a whole sea; and wherever the water goes, it brings life. It even turns the Dead Sea into the Alive Sea.

DARRELL DELANEY

Love it; it is beautiful because this is actually a picture of a covenant-keeping, promise-keeping God who remembers that he made a promise to Abraham way back. We talked about this in another episode, where God made a promise that he would make Abraham a blessing, and that all the nations of the earth would be blessed through him; and it is really powerful to see that this passage is actually God being reminded, and he is reminding Israel: I made a promise. It also echoes to me. We have the full counsel of God through Revelation. It reminds me of the River of Life that happens in Revelation, where the water is flowing through the city and there are a lot of good things happening there. So, it eventually will be fully consummated at the end of all things.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; but I love the littleness; I love how it begins with just a little trickle...just a little bit. It doesn't look like much. It doesn't look like it could do anything at all. You couldn't keep a geranium plant alive with that little bit of water, right? And that...that, Darrell, is just so typical of God's MO, if we want to call it...his modus operandi...the way God operates. Abram and Sarai...he couldn't start smaller than that, right?

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And even, you know, Israel was never that big of a nation, and so forth; and then ultimately, of course, we are going to get to the Son of God, born as a baby. It just doesn't look hopeful...it just doesn't look big enough; and we always want something bigger, right? And yet, out of the littleness of Abram and Sarai eventually does come Israel; and out of Israel eventually does come Jesus—Emmanuel—God with us. It is just an amazing thing.

A friend of mine who preached a sermon on this one time also kind of connected it to the bread and the wine of the Lord's Supper; you know, we usually just have a little cube of bread and just a little dram of wine or juice. It doesn't look like much...it doesn't look like a meal. You couldn't feed anybody for long on this; and yet, out of that little sacrament is all the fullness of Jesus.

DARRELL DELANEY

And you know what is really powerful to me is that I feel pretty small and I feel pretty ordinary...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes.

DARRELL DELANEY

And God is still in the business of taking small and ordinary things and doing extraordinary things with them. All through the Old Testament, and even in the New Testament, he continues to use small and ordinary things, like sheep, gate, door...like a staff in your hand, Moses, or bread on the table or ravens or whatever it is; and I love that he can use our own lives as these testimonies unto him as seeds planted, as little trickles that happen to turn into a river that points people back to God.

SCOTT HOEZEE

I love that. There are no unimportant people, right? There are no unimportant people in the Church or in God's creation. God can and does use everybody, even someone who ended up doing so much good that she gained worldwide fame, Mother Teresa of Calcutta, she always said: I am just a little pencil in God's hand...you know, that is all I am...just a little pencil in God's hand; and God does indeed take all of us little pencils...we are all little pencils; but when the hand of the Master...the Artist of creation grabs us, he can draw and write great things with our lives; and I think as Ezekiel concludes here, that is a great encouragement for all of us, that salvation may look like it starts small, or maybe our witness to a co-worker looks insufficient, but from a little trickle can come a mighty sea; from the little sacrament of the Lord's

Supper comes all the fullness of Christ.

DARRELL DELANEY

The original mission that God had given through Abraham was that all the nations of earth would be blessed through Israel; and he is bringing them back to that mission at the end of this book in Ezekiel. He is making sure they remember: You were called to be an inheritance; you were called to be a light; you were called to be a witness that all of them might know what God's name is; and then we pick that up in the New Testament when Jesus says: Go and make disciples of all nations. It is our call to be lights and to be witnesses; and God restores us so we can do that.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And he has indeed done that because we are never alone; and if we go to the very end of Ezekiel...Ezekiel 48:35; it is the last verse of the whole book, Darrell. God takes Ezekiel in a vision to the new city of Jerusalem and he shows him like a plaque...there is like a plaque on the city gate, and it says two words: *Yahweh Sammah*—the Lord is here. That sounds a lot like Emmanuel to me...

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

God with us. God restores his people. He has restored us in Christ, thanks be to God.

Well, thanks for listening and digging deeply into scripture with *Groundwork*. We hope you will join us again next time as we continue to dig deeply into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives.

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DARRELL DELANEY

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