

BREATHE ON ME BREATH OF GOD

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A few years ago, I heard my cousin, Elder Richard Renfrow, of Valley Station, KY preach a sermon about experiencing the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. He mentioned the Pentecost experience in the New Testament and he also mentioned the Kirtland temple dedication when they sang for the first time, the song "The Spirit of God Like a Fire is Burning," and how God poured out His spirit at that momentous occasion and His sons and daughters testified of a great energizing power - and they were revitalized!

I remember thinking that this is what we need today - this revitalization - this outpouring of the power of the Holy Spirit. I also remember thinking: but how could it ever happen to us? We are scattered and separated in so many ways. We seem to be satisfied with much less than God is surely prepared to give us if we were earnestly seeking Him. My thoughts suggested that there was not a lot of evidence of keeping all God's commandments. As I continued to let my thoughts wander, I thought about the universal lack of repentance and not reaching out to others with love and patience. My thoughts turned negative and I concluded that we're really not good representatives of God's people - if so, we would all be full of Enthusiasm and Joy, Love and Forgiveness and living our daily lives with Hope and Happiness! Think about it, without those attributes, we are showing signs of being practically dead!

As I was thinking these thoughts, my cousin went on to talk about the Israelites during the days of ancient Israel when they - the chosen people of God - were captured and exiled in Babylon. They felt defeated by their past experiences, depressed by their present circumstances and dejected by a lack of hope for their future because they felt completely cut off from the God of Israel when they heard of the complete destruction of Jerusalem. A proverb of despair passed among them that described their situation:

"...Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost; we are cut off..." (Ezek. 37:11 -IV)

That's US, I thought! However, I then heard the words: God is always prepared for every circumstance! In this instance of the captive Israelites, He had Ezekiel on the scene. Ezekiel was in exile with God's people and God had commanded him to preach against the sin of the people; they, however, were not accepting his message; and this weighed heavily on his heart. Ezekiel realized he needed to be responsive to the Spirit and because he was, he learned that there was hope of restoration and that God is not only the God of our mountain top experiences, but also the God of our valleys.

Maybe some of you, like me, often feel that you are in a valley - a valley of despondency, or of poor health, or of a feeling of being separated from God. Well, the testimony of Ezekiel - and, actually, of all the scriptures - is that God is there and active in the valleys - even though we may walk in the valley of the shadow of death! In a powerful experience, Ezekiel saw and heard the word of the Lord during his walk in a valley - and he had a mountain top experience.

Today I want to remind you of that experience. You'll find it in: Ezekiel 37:1-14

In this vision, Ezekiel looked out over a valley and he looked upon a scene which was

very grim. As far as the eye could see, Ezekiel saw nothing but the bleached, dry, skeletal bones of the dead. It was a ghastly, graphic scene, based on the people's own proverb:

“Our bones are dried; our hope is lost; we are cut off.” (v.11 -IV)

As Ezekiel looked upon this scene and tried to comprehend it, God spoke to him and asked:

“Son of man, can these bones live?” (v.3 -IV)

Well, Ezekiel didn't know the answer, but he knew who did and so he replied:

“O Lord God, thou knowest!” (v.3 -IV)

Now the story takes a *very strange* turn: God told Ezekiel to prophesy or speak to those bleached, chalky, lifeless bones! The next scene would challenge even today's computer-generated movie makers! These are Ezekiel's words:

“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!” (v.7 -IV)

Remember the old spiritual, ‘Dem Bones’? It gives us some idea of what Ezekiel saw : the head bone connected to the neck bone; the neck bone connected to the chest bone ... on down the body to the ankle bone; and the ankle bone connected to the foot bone – then the phrase: “ Oh hear the Word of the Lord!” And hear that Word they did! Those bones all came together! But bones and skeletons are not living, breathing, active men and women; they are still only dry bones. The question remains: Can these bones live? The question was not long in getting an answer. Muscle and flesh and skin began to cover those bones! The valley was scattered with bodies - but they were still dead bodies; there was no LIFE in them.

And once again the Word of the Lord came to Ezekiel “... 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.” (v.9 -IV)

So Ezekiel prophesied as he was commanded and “the breath came into them and they [the bodies] lived, and stood upon their feet, an exceeding great army.” (v.10 -IV)
The Lord, then, interpreted for Ezekiel what had just happened:

The vision was a picture of the restoration of Israel, an Israel that appeared as dead as those dry bones! When we look at the whole chapter, Ezekiel makes the point of this vision clear: Israel's past was in ‘smithereens’ - years of rebellion against God and His rules had led to their spiritual death. They were right to think of themselves as dried up, lifeless bones; but they were wrong in their conclusion. This was not the end - there IS Hope.

The dead bones of Israel would revive. (v.14, 21-28 -IV)

This was a word of hope to the House of Israel in exile - but it should also be considered a word to the present day church of Jesus Christ. And what does this mean to us, today? Under God's power, when either a spiritually dead person, or an old dry bone, feels the Spirit of God, it IS going to come to life! We too, can have hope of restoration and newness of life through the Holy Spirit. Our despondency and lethargy, our dead faith and commitment can be revived!

The nation of Israel did not get restored because they deserved it - they were restored because God loved Israel and wanted them to believe in Him. He loves us also and expects us to believe in His Son, Jesus Christ. To believe means that we accept His rule over us - and that

means we must be obedient - and **obedience** means that we *repent* of our sinful ways and make His righteous ways a part of our lives. It is all too common for people to want everything spiritual done for them: to want to do little or nothing themselves, whether it be study and praying, worship and singing, service and work, or witness and testimony. When that is the case, it is another evidence of the absence of the Spirit of God - the breath of true life. Ezekiel's experience captured the idea of the necessity of the Spirit's presence in our lives. Without the Spirit of God, we have nothing but form - no real life. We need to have that Spirit in our lives, endowing us with power, transforming our weakness into strength, touching us and making us alive - just like what happened to the dry bones in the valley.

Ezekiel's dry bones of spiritual death were gathered together adding sinew and skin; then he spoke the message of life to them. Let me quote from those scriptures: "The breath came into them, and they lived, and stood up upon their feet." Now, go back to that passage and read the last half of verse 9 in chapter 37 as background, and then read Verse 10 in the first person: ...and the breath came into ME, and I lived, and stood up upon MY feet...

- ready to accept responsibility to be ALIVE in Christ,
- ready to experience and administer HOPE and the JOY of living righteously.
- ready to obey God with every aspect of my life and move forward in FAITH.

The Holy Ghost was poured out on the people of God at Pentecost with such power that they were spiritually energized and accomplished unbelievable things under that expression of God's Spirit. The Kirtland Temple experience was another powerful outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Generations have remembered and prayed that a similar heavenly endowment would take place in their lifetime. We need to realize that comparable experiences can be ours today!

A prophecy in the Book of Joel tells us that God will pour out His Spirit upon the sons and the daughters. They shall prophecy and the young men shall see visions and the old men shall dream dreams - and in those days God will, indeed, pour out His spirit on His servants and upon His handmaidens. (Joel 2:28-29)

"In those days" is a phrase that Bible scholars agree means "in the LAST days" - the days when latter day Israel will turn to the Lord! That includes US. We're living in the last days! We have to want an outpouring of the Holy Spirit so much that we are willing to sacrifice and sanctify our lives and become the holy people who love God and serve him with the expectation He will bestow that kind of power. It is expedient that we breathe the breath of God by responding to His Holy Spirit and becoming spiritually ALIVE.

v. = verse IV = Inspired Version

Study Ezekiel 37:1-14 Questions to Consider:

If you were asked to speak to dry bones, would you think it was a futile exercise?

Do you relate to the ancient Israelite proverb: "...our hope is lost; we are cut off..." ?

In Ephesians 2:1, Paul told the Ephesians, "...you were dead in your transgressions and sins."
Can this quote be related to the experience of the dry bones?

Do you see the church, today, as the lifeless bones in Ezekiel's vision? Why or why not?

What are your thoughts about the mysterious phenomenon of the bones beginning to stir and join together?

What significance was the wind in this allegory? What other scriptural experiences involve the wind?

Why do you think Pentecost and the Kirtland Temple dedication were referred to in this account?

What truth spoke to you in this lesson?

How has God energized and renewed your life?

Review the words to our hymn "The Spirit of God Like a Fire is Burning."
Do you believe these words are significant today?

Consider the hymn "Breathe On Me Breath of God." Does it, for you, catch the Spirit of Ezekiel's message?