

Bone Surgery

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[0 : 00] O God our Father, breathe on us and in us we pray the breath of your Holy Spirit, that you may make our hearts, hearts of flesh responsive to your word, that we may live faithful, obedient lives, knowing you as our God and serving you all our days, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Somewhere in Rome, my memory is that it's not far from the Spanish Steps, there is an old church, which is not particularly remarkable in itself because you only have to turn a few degrees in Rome and you'll see some old church somewhere.

But this one is particularly odd. In fact, many of the old churches in Rome are fairly odd in different ways. This is quite peculiar. Underneath this church or chapel is a crypt.

It's part of an old monastery, if my memory is correct. And it's that of the Capuchin monks. Now, these are not the people who invented cappuccino. And if you're a tourist there, don't go asking for a cappuccino.

I'm not sure that you get one. But it's well worth a visit. The next time you're in Rome, all roads lead there after all, so you've got to go there one day. And underneath this chapel, the Capuchin church or chapel, is a crypt.

[1 : 22] In the crypt are all sorts of arrangements. It's like, in a sense, what looks to be a little bit like prison cells, but it's really barred off alcoves so you can't go in.

But you can look through the bars and see the arrangements. What look to be like floral arrangements on the walls or mosaic sort of things, it's even a clock that works.

What's peculiar is what it's made of. It's made of bones. Lots of bones. The bones of the dead Capuchin monks.

And so you have femur bones and other bones of this length that sort of give you different patterns. And then you've got little finger bones to give you the intricate detail in arrangements or clock faces or whatever it is.

It's a bit eerie in a way. In some senses, it's rather beautiful. And my memory is that their testimony about it is that the bones are there, in one sense, on display as a bit of a testimony for the resurrection of the dead.

[2 : 30] That is, they are waiting for the dead Capuchin monks to rise on the day of Jesus' return. Now, if you're going to visit that place, let me suggest that you don't go on the day of Jesus' return.

Because I think you'd run the risk of being pierced by a flying femur. Because I'm sure that the bones are not in arrangements with the rest of the body from which they came.

That is, they collected finger bones and femur bones because of the size and made their arrangements. And I would imagine that on the day of the resurrection, there'll be a femur from this part joining up with whatever femurs join with over here and knee bones and finger bones and skull bones and so on.

They'll be flying around, keep clear, on the day of Jesus' return. But the arrangements are meant to be a testimony for resurrection hope.

Ezekiel's vision in chapter 37, it's a vision. He's not, in one sense, really there. He's taken there in a vision like he was taken to Jerusalem in a vision in chapter 8.

[3 : 36] Same sort of opening language in the beginning of chapter 37 as there was in the beginning of chapter 8. But it doesn't lack vividness for it being a vision. Remember that in that vision in Ezekiel 8 to 11 in Jerusalem, Ezekiel even cries out at one point.

So vivid is the vision. Likewise here, this vision of his, of the dead bones in the valley, is rather eerie. In one sense, it's reminded me of that Capuchin crypt in Rome.

But this is a bit more gruesome, I think. A bit more grotesque in many ways. He's taken by God's spirit to a valley.

He's already been in the valley back in chapter 3. It's a valley in exile. And that's important that we understand that context. He's not taken back to the valley by Jerusalem. It's a valley in exile.

Far away from the land. That's important to grasp. Indeed, as we've seen in chapters 34 and 36, the same theme comes out. This is hope for those in exile, not hope for those back in Jerusalem or in the land.

[4 : 44] And the valley, we're told, at the end of verse 1 was full of bones. Not just a handful of skeletons scattered, but stacks and stacks of bones.

At the end of verse 10, later on, as they come to life, it is a vast multitude. Or a vast army, some translations have. We are talking about many, many, many bones.

Many, many, many skeletons or many, many, many dead people involved in this vision. They're scattered around the valley. It reminds us a bit of a battlefield in a way.

Except they're dried skeletons. They're not corpses recently shot down. As I was trying to imagine this, I was imagining what some of my Burmese friends told me when I was there in August last year.

Of the aftermath of Cyclone Nargis. Some of them had gone taking aid to Christian churches in the Delta area. And they'd come to a Buddhist village.

[5 : 49] There was no church there. And it seemed that basically the Buddhists did not go and help the Buddhists. And these were people so traumatized that a week after, they were sitting in a field, their houses destroyed, and bodies just lying around them.

And this is what came to my mind. Except these bones are very dry. You see, these are not corpses. They are skeletons. The bones may not even be quite still assembled as a skeleton.

We're not really sure. That is, they're very dead. They've been dead a long time. Maybe the flesh has been scavenged by vultures or eagles. Maybe it's just rotted away over time.

The bones are very dry. It's very dead. There is not a hint or a glimmer of life. It's important to get that sense because it's emphasized.

The end of verse 2, they were very dry. So it's absolutely sun bleached and lifeless, we might say. But don't think cemetery either as you try to imagine this.

[6 : 58] We're not going through a stroll through the Villa Bretonneur Cemetery in the Somme area in France or Melbourne General or Templestowe or something like that.

You see, these bones are unburied. They're on the ground. That adds to the awfulness of this vision.

For a Jew not to be buried was degrading. It adds insult to injury. It suggests curse. There's no respectful burial for them.

These are bodies dead, lying on the ground, long dead, lying on the ground. And nobody's come to bury them. It's not a cemetery that's in this vision.

Ezekiel's excursion into Death Valley, at least in this vision, must have been rather distressing for him. It would be for us, I imagine. We wouldn't be recognizing anyone.

[7 : 58] They'd be just bones or skeletons. But it would be distressing seeing all this ex-human life lying around. Doubly so for him. In verse 2, we're told that he led me, that is the Spirit of God or God himself, led me around them, to and fro, literally.

That is, he wandered around as a sort of thorough excursion or examination. What adds distress for Ezekiel is, remember, he was a priest. Well, he was from the tribe of Levites.

He was 30 at the beginning of the book. Look, that's the age he would have been, in a sense, ordained as a priest, except that he was in exile. And later, the temple was destroyed. But especially for a priest, you would not want to become unclean.

And touching a corpse or a bone would render you unclean. So this would be doubly troubling for Ezekiel as he's led in this excursion through this valley.

Remember earlier, he balked at eating food cooked from human dung because it would make him unclean. So those issues are not absent in this book for Ezekiel.

[9 : 07] He really is placed in great dilemmas in this book as he identifies with God and between God and the people of God. Well, having shown him this, we then get this peculiar question in verse 3.

Mortal, can these bones live? Now, what sort of question is that? Is it the question of a magician trying to pull a trick? Well, not really.

Can these bones live? I wonder what Ezekiel could have answered. He answers at the end of verse 3, Oh Lord God, you know, which is a rather diplomatic answer.

Because he's acknowledging that with God, they could or they may not live. That is, life is in God's hands. Is, I think, behind the answer of Ezekiel to God.

But think to the background of what Ezekiel would know that leads him to that sort of answer. We might think it's a slightly ambivalent answer. He's acknowledging God's power. You see, Ezekiel, we assume, would know his Old Testament, at least thus far.

[10 : 19] He would know that Elijah and Elisha brought back from the dead. One person each. That Elisha's bones were touched against a dead person in 2 Kings 13 and brought back life.

They were people recently dead. They were corpses, not skeletons and dry bones. But he would know that. Presumably, he would know words like Deuteronomy chapter 32, verse 39.

God, in the song of Moses, Now that's not the only verse that says as much.

I kill, I make a life. And Ezekiel presumably would know Genesis. The story of God bringing life out of nothing. So that's part of the general background that Ezekiel would have at this point.

Except these are long dead bones. Very dry bones. No flesh at all. Lord God, you know. I think that means you can do it if you choose.

[11 : 31] But you may not choose. Presumably, at this point, Ezekiel doesn't understand what the vision is symbolising or signifying. Well, God's reply, he doesn't actually reply and answer the question.

But issues a command. He says in verse 4, Now there are times when you're a preacher preaching a sermon.

And you wonder if there's much response in the pews. But imagine how hard it would be for Ezekiel to preach to what he knows are dry bones.

Dry bones don't hear. We know the ear has different little bones in it, apparently. But the bones don't do the hearing, apparently.

Here he is commanded to do something that's relatively absurd. Preach to a pile of dead bones in a valley. But he does it.

[12 : 38] And this is what he prophesied. In verse 5 and 6. Thus says the Lord God to these bones. That is, he doesn't prophesy his own word, but as we've seen from chapter 1 all the way through this book, the words of Ezekiel are the words of God.

This is what God says. The result, or at least the goal, The result, or at least the goal, of this prophecy is not merely life.

The goal of God's action is that God's prophecy is not merely life. The goal of God's prophecy is that God will have a purpose in the Bible, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live, and you shall know that I am the Lord.

The result, or at least the goal, of this prophecy is not merely life.

The goal of the prophecy, the goal of God's action, is that you may know that I am the Lord. You dead bones, you lifeless, deaf, dead bones, sinew will come on them, muscle, flesh, and gradually, as we'll see in a minute, that all happened.

[13 : 49] They came back to be corpses, and then living beings. It's consistent, of course, as we've seen in earlier studies, that the goal in this book is that you may know, or that they, others may know, that I am God.

And here we see it again. The dead bones may know that Yahweh is God. It's the whole aim or goal of God, all through the book of Ezekiel, but not only there as well.

And Ezekiel obeyed. He prophesied as he'd been commanded in verse 7. And as I prophesied, suddenly there was a noise. It's hard to imagine, isn't it, the eeriness of this.

I imagine being this vast valley that is silent, breathless with dead bones. And as he prophesied, that is, no sooner are the words out of his mouth than they are being fulfilled.

And there's a noise. Presumably as bones begin to rattle, join together, as sinew joins them together, as flesh comes upon them, as they begin to move to become corpses, they make a noise.

[15 : 01] What an eerie thing. What an unnerving thing that must have been for Ezekiel to hear and to see. But it's as I prophesied. That is, the powerful word of God is almost immediately, instantaneously, bringing about its desired effect.

There's no long delay. There's no watering it at 6am in the morning to try and bring life to it. There's no coming out in a few days to see if it's little sprouts of sinew or something like that.

But as he prophesies, as he speaks just those few sentences or lines, it's all coming to life in front of him. Powerful word, God's word.

That's part of the thrust of this passage. That the word of God is powerful enough to bring life from what is dead. There was a noise, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone.

We have no idea if this is like the Capuchin Monastery where the bones are all separated from the body from which they came. We don't know if this rattling is femurs flying to join other femurs in the air or something like that or whether they're all in little piles and it's just that little rattle.

[16 : 15] But either way, instantly, God's word is being fulfilled. I looked and there were sinews on them and flesh had come upon them and skin had covered them.

It's as though Ezekiel merely utters the words and instantly there's the rattling noise, the sinews and the flesh and right before his eyes. It's not like a slow motion film watching it bit by bit growing.

Totally quickly, immediately. But there was no breath in them. The end of verse 8. So then the Lord said to me, prophesy to the breath.

To the breath. Prophecy to the breath that's not there. Prophecy, mortal, and say to the breath, thus says the Lord God, come forth from the four winds.

There's a play on words here which I'll explain a bit more in a minute but the wind is the same name as breath. Same word. O breath, come from the four winds O breath and breathe upon these slain that they may live.

[17 : 24] I prophesied as he commanded me and the breath came into them. Again, the word of God being fulfilled. A word of God that is powerful to accomplish its object.

And they lived. And they stood on their feet. A vast multitude. I reckon that would be a bit scary. A bit scientific fiction movie-ish.

Not that I watch that sort of genre. But suddenly seeing these bones become corpses and then all of a sudden the breath goes in and up they stand like a vast army. It reminds me as I was thinking of this, of the terracotta warriors in Xi'an in China which I saw last year.

This vast burial pit for one of the very early emperors 2,000 years ago. Hundreds, thousands even of terracotta warriors many of which are now lying flat but many still standing.

Like a vast army surrounding the tomb of this old emperor. That's the sort of thing that's happening here as they stand up a valley full, an army full of living beings.

[18 : 28] From bones to lifeless corpse to living being. It's very much like something earlier in scripture. It's very much like Genesis 2.

where out of the dust of the ground God forms a man and then breathes into him the breath of life and he becomes a living being.

I'm sure it's a deliberate two stages to match Genesis 2. But this is a new birth in effect. This is a new creation that's being envisioned before Ezekiel's eyes here.

Ten times in this section up to verse 14 comes the word for breath. The Hebrew word is ruach. I'm going to give you about three Hebrew words tonight.

I thought we might as well challenge you, keep you awake on a mild evening. And ruach is the first. R-U-A hard H often a C-H in English writing. The trouble is with this word it can mean three different things.

[19 : 32] You might think that's odd but a lot of our English words are the same. They all mean different things you just know in context the meaning. It means breath or spirit or wind. In verse 1 and 14 and neatly bracketing this section beginning and ending it like a little book cover it's the spirit of God.

Verses 5, 6, 8, 10 for example it means breath as in making a person breathe or live. We've got the four winds in verse 9 same word four breaths or spirits meaning from all the directions around.

Sometimes it's a bit ambiguous is it breath or spirit but basically it's making a person living. But remember the context too from chapter 36 which I looked at on Sunday night just gone.

God said there I will put my spirit in you. So it's not simply that he's making a person again and that they become simply a living person breathing there's this added dimension of God's own spirit breathed in.

This is a new person that is being made here. It's not simply coming back to life again. It's a new person a new birth for an ultimate and glorious purpose as we'll see in a minute.

[20 : 49] So it builds on what we've seen in chapter 36 that's part of the context of God giving a new heart and a new spirit his spirit inside these people that are coming to life.

So it's not simply a resumption of life. It's not simply that they come back to life at whatever age they died and they just keep living for a while and drop dead again. We're talking about something much more profound here.

A big change a big transformation that God was anticipating in chapter 36 as well. The visions then explained in verses 11 to 14 then he said to me mortal these bones are the whole house of Israel.

They say our bones are dried up and our hope is lost. We are cut off completely. Remember we're in exile cut off from the promised land cut off from God because the temple is gone now.

It's a metaphor of hopelessness. It's actually explained for us in verse 11. So an interpretation of this that ignores that it's all about hopelessness has missed the point that God actually gives us.

[22 : 03] They say our bones are dried up. Well of course literally they're not but they're saying in effect we're dying we're hopeless God's given up on us here we are in exile by the rivers of Babylon we sat down and wept how can we worship the Lord in a strange land.

That's the hopelessness that's being expressed and it's been doubled now that the temple's destroyed. What's the future for God's people? There is none they think. It's as if our bones have dried up.

Not literally but metaphorically figuratively and the vision is explaining that. So it's not talking about people who've died in the past. It's not the bones of those who were killed when Jerusalem fell.

It's all the people of Israel living or dead but it's addressing the issue of their hopelessness in exile. And that's the same as we've seen in chapters 34 and 36 as well.

Both of those chapters are messages of hope to the exiles who feel hopeless because Jerusalem's fallen and they're in exile and so too this has the same function.

[23 : 10] So he goes on to explain in verse 12. Therefore prophesy and say to them that is not to the bones now or to at least the living beings in front of him in the valley but say to the people of Israel to whom no doubt Ezekiel describes this vision now say to those people who are in exile with you by the river Sheba in Babylon say to them thus says the Lord God I am going to open your graves and bring you up from your graves oh my people and I'll bring you back to the land of Israel again he's not specifically addressing or only addressing dead people he's addressing the exiles who are saying we're hopeless it's as if they've already died our bones are dried up is their metaphor so now the metaphor changes a bit these bones he's seen are not in a grave but it's as if those in exile think we might as well be in our graves and so to them Ezekiel says or God says I will open your graves and bring you back to the land of

Israel it's saying in effect that Babylon is like your grave you're in the grave in Babylon but I'm going to open up Babylon and I'm going to bring you out of it and bring you back to the land and you shall know that I am the Lord there it is yet again the aim of this the aim you see is not simply to rescue poor old Israel the aim is that they and the nations will know that God is God when I open your graves and bring you up from your graves oh my people then I'll put my spirit within you and you shall live you see it's not just bringing the same group of people back but God's spirit will now be in them as we're seen in the vision as we saw in chapter 36 as well and you shall live not simply living on earth but new life is what is anticipated in this and I will place you on your own soil then you shall know that I the Lord have spoken and will act the importance of that last statement is worth noting

I think we sometimes might wonder why does God have so many prophecies and prophets at work in the Old Testament and the reason is simple when God says that something will happen and then it does as he said it is indisputable that God has done it if God had no prophecy of a return to the land but they return to the land then it's open for interpretation about how has this happened but because God predicts things to happen and then they happen we know that it is of God so with the return from exile it's not because Cyrus was benevolent in 539 BC allowing the Jews to return it's because God overruled and superintended that event when Jesus came we know that it is fulfilling prophecy so we understand the significance of what Jesus came to do without the prophecy its fulfillment is too open for interpretation and that's what the end of verse 14 is saying you shall know that

I the Lord have spoken and will act that is you've heard my word and when it's fulfilled you will be even clearer that I am God and I've done this often this vision is misinterpreted as though it's simply about the resurrection of the dead I shouldn't say simply because that's a profound event but that's actually not the primary reference or fulfillment of this vision it's not really about life from the grave it's not really about life after death while it fits that general picture or trajectory of new life even after death its fundamental statement is about hope for the hopeless a hope that is grounded in the spirit of God in people I should say that the resurrection physical resurrection of the dead is not a strongly articulated statement in the

Old Testament it's there a little bit in Daniel 12 and that's probably the clearest verse in the Old Testament the beginning of Daniel 12 at that time Michael the great prince the protector of your people shall arise there shall be a time of anguish such as has never occurred since nations first came into existence but at that time your people shall be delivered everyone who's found written in the book many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake some to everlasting life and some to shame and everlasting contempt that's the clearest statement in the whole of the Old Testament and Daniel is later than Ezekiel there's not much articulated hope of the resurrection not to say that it denies it it helps us explain why the Jews disputed it in Jesus day if you remember in Luke 20 the Sadducees and the Pharisees the idea of resurrection from the dead is probably an evolved idea and it also means that when Jesus rose from the dead it's an even greater shock greater triumph than even the

[28 : 30] Old Testament really understood in advance the key idea for this is hope for exiled Israel not resurrection from the dead and that's why verse 11 is so important our bones are dried up and our hope is lost they're quoting the hopelessness of the people so the New Testament parallels if you like the New Testament where this lands in the New Testament and we find its primary reference is not on the Easter morning when the grave of Jesus is empty but rather I think in words like Jesus words to Nicodemus you have to be born again or born from above born by spirit and water for example words like in Ephesians 2 you were dead in your trespasses but God has made you alive in Christ that I think is where the primary reference of this passage is heading from death to life that is death to God or dead in sin which is what Israel was dead in hopelessness but now alive with the spirit of God in a new birth alive in Christ with God's spirit in us as anticipated in the previous chapter as well not to deny that it's part of the bigger picture leading to the resurrection of

Jesus because ultimately the new birth in Christ and the new life in Christ is totally realized in the resurrection life that seems to me the secondary step not the primary one from where this passage is leading us this vision gives hope hope to the exiles hope to the hopeless that God will do an astonishing thing as he puts his spirit in people who are as good as dead dead in sin dead in exile dead to God but God makes them alive to him with a new heart and a new spirit and a new life with a new birth and that of course we see so much more realized in the New Testament but only fully realized in the resurrection life in Christ there's another important dimension to this though not to lose this is not primarily about an individual it's not primarily about an individual person of God receiving new birth certainly with the Jesus to

Nicodemus he's dealing with one individual but here the whole image the whole picture the whole audience is very much a corporate one it's the people of Israel and so the next section the sign of the sticks adds and underscores that corporate nature of what's being described here verses 15 to the end of the chapter remember it was a vast number of bones and when they all came back to life it was a vast army or a vast multitude at the end of verse 10 we're not talking about one individual we're talking about a whole multitude of people coming back to life and this is hope for God's people but it raises the question then who are God's people to whom is this addressed who is Israel for that's who this is as verse 11 indicated these bones are the whole house of Israel the whole house who Israel was was under dispute in a way

Israel was another name for Jacob remember when he wrestled with God on his way back into the land in Genesis he was given by God the name of Israel and hence the descendants of Jacob when they came into the land under Joshua were called Israel Israelites and that became the nation's name that's simple enough but after Solomon King Solomon died in 922 or thereabouts BC after being in the land for the best part of 500 years the kingdom divided in two Solomon's son was not a good shepherd a harsh man and when he was addressed by others saying are you going to treat us harshly or not he said I'll treat you even more harshly and most of the country divided and so an army commander from Solomon's army Jeroboam led the northern king tribes to be a new kingdom they called themselves Israel a bit pretentious in a way it left the southern kingdom to call itself Judah based on the one tribe or the main tribe from which those people came the tribe of

Judah most of the other tribes belonged in what was then called Israel for 200 years there were two kingdoms often they're even at war against each other when the northern kingdom established itself after Solomon's death with King Jeroboam he didn't have Jerusalem as his capital he didn't have Solomon's temple in order to legitimate his kingship he created two places of worship one in the south and one in the north Bethel in the south Dan at the very north he built shrines their altars and golden calves would you believe and they worshiped them to give his kingship some religious so-called legitimacy false sanctuaries of worship for 200 years that kingdom lasted the kings did not descend from David none of them did none of those kings were good many of them were killed assassinated the dynasties didn't last very long and in 721 about 200 years after it started that kingdom was wiped out by the Assyrians when they surrounded conquered and destroyed the capital then Samaria and off they went to exile and in many respects largely sort of never to be seen again you know there's that weird view that the lost tribes of Israel all emigrated to

[34 : 24] England probably flying British airways and the Queen of England is descended from them and she's really the I mean it's nonsense but there's still people actually believe it would you believe some of those people some of those tribes did go to Judah some of them came back later but many of them just interbred in the other nations and out of some of them came in the end the Samaritans the name from which comes from the then capital Samaria so there were two kingdoms one of which by Ezekiel's day is gone 150 years or so before Ezekiel's prophecies but it raises the question then who is the legitimate Israel in Ezekiel it is Judah who is in exile but now this prophecy is to the whole house of Israel Ezekiel is given a little charade acting out thing he's had a few of those in earlier chapters not all of which we've seen and it in a sense underscores his message two sticks of wood literally two woods he's to take that's not a golfing term but that's literally what it is they may not be sticks off a tree they may actually be some suggest flat planks of wood maybe even wooden writing tablets you have to write on these or he did and he joins them together sort of with his hand so that it looks like one stick or joined together I suggest that it's probably wood that you would write on they didn't really have much paper and papyrus and so on in those days if it was in our day probably say take two pieces of paper and write on one and write on the other and join them together in your hand so that it looks as though you've got one bit of paper what's he writing on these bits of wood in verse 16 on one he writes for

Judah and the Israelites associated with it on the other he writes for Joseph in brackets the stick of Ephraim and all the house of Israel associated with it now Ephraim was probably the main tribe of the northern kingdom and sometimes in poetry in the Old Testament the northern kingdom is called Ephraim rather than Judah Joseph being one of the sons of Jacob and Ephraim being one of his sons and therefore a tribe what this symbol if you like of Ezekiel is doing is taking what looked to be two kingdoms or two nations in Israel's earlier history bringing them together but notice that on each of them it has Israel written and the Israelites associated with it and the Israelites associated with it they're joined together in his hand the emphasis in here is on the word one in the first half of the chapter 10 times the word ruach occurred for spirit breath or wind now in the last part of the chapter 10 times again comes my second

Hebrew word for the night ehad one sometimes in our English translations it's comes out as a the indefinite article comes out as another or one or even together it hard to work out quite how that happens but let me give you verse 17 literally verse 17 in this translation says and join them together into one stick but literally combine them one to one into one would so that they may become one in your hand see the emphasis on the word one that our English translation loses a little bit it's a bit clumsy to keep reading it too literally but that's the point of it the emphasis is on one one one all the way through this this is a promise you see for the whole of the house of Israel so in verse 22 it is one nation I will make them one nation in the land on the mountains of

Israel and one king shall be over them all not two nations like before not two kings like before but one one the beginning of verse 24 we read my servant David shall be king over them and they shall have one shepherd synonym with king we saw that in chapter 34 last week this emphasis on one now let's think a little bit about this unity is a biblical thing God wants to bring people together as one his people together as one Jesus prayed in John 17 that they may be one as you and I are one in Ephesians 2 those who are near those who are far off brought together one in Christ but never in the Bible is it unity at any cost never is unity the absolute goal something that's actually worth addressing to some denominational leaders at least in my denomination around the world oneness is found under God oneness is found in faith in Christ and united under God united in the truth of the gospel and so on that is it's a God centered or gospel centered unity not an institutional unity and that's what's I think intimated here in verse 23 for example they this one group of people this one nation shall never again defile themselves with their idols and their detestable things or with any of their transgressions that is there's a oneness that is tied to them being holy I will save them from all the apostates into which they have fallen and will cleanse them they should be my people and I will be their God it's a oneness with God the same God being worshipped by all it's a unity in truth a unity in holiness therefore an absence of other gods and an absence of idolatry it's a unity in obedience at the end of verse 24 they shall follow my ordinances and be careful to observe my statutes one king David verses 24 and 25 mention him as I said from chapter 34 that's building on that theme from there notice to that

David is called in both verses 24 and 25 my servant David now often God's people or leaders of God's people are called my servant Moses for example David here it's probably significant because the kings that led to the division were hardly servants of God it's through their lack of servanthood that the kingdom actually divided what's needed for unity is a servant king the one descended from David as promised here this promise then leads to the fulfillment of the promises to David in 2 Samuel 7 what's called the Davidic covenant and then in verse 25 they shall come back to the land and live in the land that I gave to my servant Jacob grandson of Abraham that is that fulfills the promise to Abraham in Genesis 12 the two great Old Testament covenants Abraham and David will be fulfilled and they are brought together anyway else we're in the Old Testament but they'll be fulfilled together as a result of what God's spirit does in the lives of God's people you see this is not more of the same this is not just saying okay get up you're going back to the land and let's start over again and see if we can do better the second time none of that this is new the spirit of

[42 : 18] God breathed into those who are hopeless not just saying come on you hopeless lot get up and we'll give you some hope and back to the land it's new and it will last six times in these last verses the word everlasting or forever occurs not always easily translated in our English translations but it's clear that what's being anticipated now is not more of the same but something that is good perfect and will remain so it will never be spoiled by a fall like happened in the garden of Eden so the end of verse 25 for example they shall come back into the land in which your ancestors live they and their children and their children's children shall live there forever and my servant David shall be their prince forever prince not king because God is the real king forever forever verse 26 I'll make a covenant of peace with them it shall be an everlasting covenant the Hebrew word forever everlasting is Olam so there's your third Hebrew word to remember for the night and last Hebrew word you might be relieved to know also verse 26 ends by saying I will bless them and multiply them language that comes from the Abrahamic covenant and will set my sanctuary among them forevermore and that's significant because firstly the sanctuary of the temple of Jerusalem has been destroyed and secondly because the two kingdoms had three sanctuaries

Jerusalem the legitimate one in the south and the northern kingdom with Bethel and Dan but now the people of God will have one sanctuary doesn't necessarily mean one rebuilt temple we'll deal with that issue on Sunday night as we look at the last vision of the book then but God's sanctuary means that verse 27 my dwelling place shall be with them he won't be distant from them we know in fact that God is with them in exile because of that vision from chapters 8 to 11 and the vision in chapter 1 and God will remain with them my dwelling place shall be with them I will be their God and they shall be my people again we see that sort of summary of God's purpose it's not quite the language of they will know that I am God but that I am their God and they are my people says as much the same at the heart of it all lies a relationship with Almighty God God is working remember we saw this on Sunday night very clearly God is working through his people Israel through the history of the Old Testament not for their sake not primarily for their benefit ultimately for God's glory and

God's glory will be greatest when the people of the whole world of all nations honor and glorify him his aim was that a glorious and holy Israel in the land would attract the other nations to him but instead of the Israel being like God and attracting nations Israel became like the nations and God bundled them out now God will do this miraculous work he will put his spirit in them a new heart in them he'll bring them back to the land and now they will obey and now they will love and through them the world will be blessed but this is not fulfilled in 539 when Jews go back to the land it's not fulfilled in the latter pages of the Old Testament the prophets of Haggai Zechariah Malachi make that clear there is more to come geographically they've gone back but spiritually they've not yet as we saw in fact in chapter 36 last Sunday night the new heart comes through through the cross and the spirit comes through the cross for the power of the spirit of God sent at Pentecost it's the spirit of Christ and its power derives from the power of the cross applied in the hearts of those who God brings to himself the fulfillment of this doesn't lie in the

Old Testament but in the new and through the cross you see this is a vision of new birth it's a vision of new birth for any people and all people for the whole house of Israel is not just those racially descended from Israel but are those who share the faith of Abraham as Paul says in Romans 4 that is this is a vision of a new birth of a new spirit a new heart to any of faith Jew or Gentile for the church is the Israel of God as Paul says in Galatians 6 verse 16 this vision is about the effect of God's work that will bring about holiness an absence of idolatry will bring about observance of God's commands will bring about the fulfillment of all his promises to Abraham and David and we know those promises are not fulfilled until Jesus comes and we know they won't be fully realized until Jesus returns as well so this chapter this wonderful chapter and well-known but often misinterpreted is I think even better than its misinterpretation this is a reminder of the power of God's word to bring life to those who are dead it's a reminder for me to keep preaching a powerful word even when I think it might fall on deaf ears for God's word is powerful not me to bring life to what is dead and when God applies his spirit to his word then new life the dead receive so it's a reminder to those who preach to teach the Bible those who lead Bible study groups not to lose hope to keep on doing those things it's a reminder to us that we cannot save ourselves we can't change ourselves we can't bring new life to ourselves we can't breathe life into our own dead bones we can't have our own strength or merit warrant any of this from God it is purely a work of grace it's a humbling message to us this is also a rebuke to our hopelessness to the times when we might despair and say how can I worship the Lord in a strange land or something similar for of course with

God nothing's impossible even life to very dry bones it's also a reminder to us that God's purpose is not thwarted by our sin Israel is in exile for its sin gross terrible sin but God's purpose still stands his promises will not be thwarted he will use even sinful people people who do not deserve it to bring about the fulfillment of his purposes it's an encouragement to us because often we fail our failure does not stop the faithfulness of God it's a challenge to us not to fail the challenge to us to be holy to live the new life and the new birth but not to become so despondent and hopeless as though somehow where we've lost it for God and this is a reminder to to us about heaven something that we'll see more next week in fact that heaven in fact is full of the glory of God that the relationship with God and the knowledge that God is God lies at the heart of his purpose and at the heart of his kingdom and that's where we're heading on Sunday night in the closing vision let's respond to God's word by standing and singing and then we'll have prayer after that we're going to sing my hope is built on nothing less than Jesus blood and righteousness number 462 pole■ religethed estava and that I'm going to share it of other obscenium mon szczegól to say he himself listening to God the partnership with God of our

[50 : 47] He had of the partnership with God os all you