

Can These Bones Live?

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Ezekiel 37:1-10

Every time I travel around the world, I face the reality called the **Armenian Diaspora, *spyurkahayoutioun***. It is incredible to see, as William Saroyan put it, when two or three Armenians gather somewhere in the world they create a “new Armenia”. Now that I am in Fresno, I am meeting new Armenians whom I have never seen them before. But when we sit together to tell our stories, we instantly become brothers and sisters, as if we have known each other many years. Last Monday night we had a meeting to organize the commemoration of the Genocide on April 24. We met around the Armenian Genocide monument in Fresno State. It was an emotional moment for me. Suddenly rain interrupted our meeting. We turned around and started walking fast towards a nearby hall. When I turned around there was beautiful rainbow, not only one, two of them. I believe God was telling us a message. “Here I am, I am your God and I will protect you.”

Last week I was also thinking about the Armenians of Syria, as you know we things escalated there AGAIN. Five years ago a friend of mine from Aleppo was describing the situation of the Armenians in an article in the newspaper called ***Kantzasar***:

People are tired of worrying and waiting for today, for tomorrow, for next month, for the New Year, for March... There is no promise, no agreement and no light at the end of the tunnel. The reality is that the probability of life and survival is diminishing. It

is only the four-letter word **“hope”** that is keeping us hanging in there and giving us the energy to face new and unexpected tragedies.

Finally last year, there was light at the end of the tunnel. Aleppo was liberated. Life was turned around. But as you follow the news, war and bombing continues in Syria. **103 years** have passed since the Armenian Genocide and Armenians have survived and thrived all over the world. I did not imagine that Aleppo, the town that welcomed all the refugees, our first shelter after the Genocide, would be in this situation. Are we facing a new genocide after all these years? The author of the article speaks about hope. Hope in what? A better condition? I hope so.

103 years passed and we have an independent Armenia. Whoever wanted to eliminate us, failed. **The credit goes to God. By His Grace**, we are what we are: **“Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail.”** (Lament. 3:22)

We read in Ezekiel 37 that after the fall of Jerusalem, prophet Ezekiel saw a new vision. God did not give up from His people. ESV commentary adds: “Before Jerusalem’s fall, warning and doom dominated Ezekiel’s message—although hints **of hope** were not absent. In the wake of Jerusalem’s destruction (33:21–22), the balance is reversed. With false hopes shattered, Ezekiel’s oracles now point to the **true source and proper shape of life renewed.**” In fact, just one chapter earlier God says: **“I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.”** (Ezk. 36:26)

God renews His commitment to His people. There is chaos, there are hearts of stone, there is destruction. But God can bring a new order, a new creation by resurrecting the dry bones.

Ezekiel witnessed an awesome vision regarding his people. There were **dry bones** in a valley, in the middle of the valley, thousands of dry, very dry bones. They remind us of the dry bones of the Armenians in the Valley of Deir Zor. Until this day, one can go to **Margade**, dig out a little, and find bones of Armenian people.

Can these bones live?

I believe God intended to describe a hopeless situation. Ezekiel was in the middle of dry, very dry land where **nothing is able to live**, filled with lifeless bones. An impossible mission where humans cannot see any hope. But God...., but God..., but God can transform these dry bones into live ones.

But God...

-First God attached tendons to these dry bones (vs.6)

We need tendons (nerves, as the Armenian version puts it) so we can have a **network of communication**. Through these tendons, the muscles **and bones will be joined**. I assume there were nerves alongside the tendons. Nerves take commands from the brain and distribute the information in order for the body to function well.

God realized that this network needed flesh and muscles.

-Next, God added **flesh and muscles**. Tendons connected the muscles to the bones. The nerves transferred the commands to the flesh and the muscles. This is the body that can hold its parts together and has the substance to survive.

Well, it does not look nice; it needs skin.

-**God added skin.** This flesh without skin is vulnerable to infections. Skin provides protection and beauty. I wonder if any of us would like to be seen without skin.

All these were wonderful, but there was **something missing: LIFE.**

ESV commentary adds: Ezekiel introduces one of the key words in the passage: the verb **“to live”** appears in vv. 3, 5, 6, 9, 10, and 14. Ezekiel’s response leaves the outcome to God’s sovereignty (6 times in 10 verses).

And he said to me, “Son of man, can these bones live?” (3)

Behold, I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. (5)

cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live, (6)

GOD: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain, that they may live.” (9)

the breath came into them, and they lived and stood on their feet, an exceedingly great army. (10)

Five times the verb **to live** occurs in this short passage indicating the importance of the concept of being alive. **Life is a gift given by a sovereign God.**

The passage describes it well. After the construction of the body, it needed God’s breath to give it life.

-**God added life, the fire, the energy.** We read:

Then he said to me, “Prophecy to the breath; prophecy, son of man, and say to the breath, Thus says the Lord GOD: Come from the four winds, O

breath, and breathe on these slain, that they may live.” (9)

This event reminds me of the story in **Genesis**. God created Adam and the beauty of the story is that **God blew His own breath on Adam**.

Let us remember what God said in chapter 36 to the Israelites who were in exile:

And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. (Ezk 36;26)

What is the use of a body without God’s Spirit? We do not just breathe. We do not just have a heart which beats every second. We need God’s Spirit in us which transforms us completely into His image.

God is the source of life. His breath is so important; without it nothing can move. Only in Armenian, we call the Word of God “The Breath of God,” (Asdvadzashounch): the book of God’s message given to the writers by HIS BREATH.

The question that I raise today is: **Why did God restore these dry bones?**

Three essential points:

1. To Know GOD

...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.” (6)

God loves us, He is a God of communication. He wants us to know Him. It is not just intellectual knowledge; it is an intimate relationship with Him.

We need His breath everyday in our life, in our daily life when we grow in His Word, when we serve Him. **Our rebirth should not be an end in itself.** We survived to know God and to praise Him. And God will use us so that others will know Him through us.

2. To become a vast army

“... and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet—a vast army.”(10)

God’s command of life was **not for a single person.** God’s miracle ended up with a **vast army.**

We are not called to **be self-ruled.** No, we are called to be free individuals serving God together.

I wish as Armenians and as Christians we understand becoming the Army of God. We live so independently; we have difficulty in serving together.

The Army has a **Commander-in-chief.** A well-trained army obeys its General/Commander. Do we obey to our chief commander, the “General”?

3. To have the Assurance of Resurrection and the Promised Land

Behold, I will open your graves and raise you from your graves, O my people. And I will bring you into the land of Israel. And you shall know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves, and raise you from your graves, (11-12)

By using this language, Ezekiel also contributes to the OT teaching on resurrection. Although clear statements of bodily life after death are not common in the OT, one of the clearest comes in Daniel (Dan. 12). Here we find that death is defeated. This is foreshadowing for what is coming in Christ. Jesus Christ defeated death on the cross. Christ gave us new chance to be born again spiritually, and when we die one day our bodies will be resurrected. Graves will not be useful anymore.

I was following Badveli Ara Jizmejian's funeral service. It was powerful. Yes, there was a lifeless body in the casket but because of Jesus there was life, there was His presence reflected in Ara's life. And what counts in the end. I want to be remembered not for my age, for my looks neither for my position. No, I want to be remembered for what Christ did in me and through me in the lives of others. That is resurrection.

103 years passed from these terrible events. We mourn, we protest and we ask God to bring justice regarding the recognition of our Genocide.

Meanwhile, we have the **duty of knowing God daily, obeying God personally and collectively as Armenians.**