

## Verses [1–14](#)

Here is, I. The vision of a resurrection from death to life, and it is a glorious resurrection. This is a thing so utterly unknown to nature, and so contrary to its principles (*a privatione ad habitum non datur regressus—from privation to possession there is no return*), that we could have no thought of it but *by the word of the Lord*; and that it is certain by that word that there shall be a general resurrection of the dead some have urged from this vision, “For” (say they) “otherwise it would not properly be made a sign for the confirming of their faith in the promise of their deliverance out of Babylon, as the coming of the Messiah is mentioned for the confirming of their faith touching a former deliverance,” [Isa. 7:14](#). But,

1. Whether it be a confirmation or no, it is without doubt a most lively representation of a threefold resurrection, besides that which it is primarily intended to be the sign of. (1.) The resurrection of souls from the death of sin to the life of righteousness, to a holy, heavenly, spiritual, and divine life, by the power of divine grace going along with the word of Christ, [Jn. 5:24, 25](#). (2.) The resurrection of the gospel church, or any part of it, from an afflicted persecuted state, especially under the yoke of the New-Testament Babylon, to liberty and peace. (3.) The resurrection of the body at the great day, especially the bodies of believers that shall rise to life eternal.

2. Let us observe the particulars of this vision.

(1.) The deplorable condition of these dead bones. The prophet was made, [1.] to take an exact view of them. By a prophetic impulse and a divine power he was, in vision, carried out and set *in the midst of a valley*, probably that plain spoken of [ch. 3:22](#), where God then *talked with him*; and it was *full of bones*, of dead men’s bones, not piled up on a heap, as in a charnel-house, but scattered upon the face of the ground, as if some bloody battle had been fought here, and the slain left unburied till all the flesh was devoured or putrefied, and nothing left but the bones, and those disjointed from one another and dispersed. He *passed by them round about*, and he observed not only that they were very many (for there are multitudes gone to the congregation of the dead), but that, *lo, they were very dry*, having been long exposed to the sun and wind. The bones that have been *moistened with marrow* ([Job 21:24](#)), when they have been any while dead, lose all their moisture, and are dry as dust. The body is now fenced with bones ([Job 10:11](#)), but then they will themselves be defenceless. The Jews in Babylon were like those dead and dry bones, unlikely ever to come together, to be so much as a skeleton, less likely to be formed into a body, and least of all to be a living body. However, they lay *unburied* in the *open valley*, which encouraged the hopes of their resurrection, as of the two witnesses, [Rev. 11:8, 9](#). The bones of Gog and Magog shall be buried ([ch. 39:12, 15](#)), for their destruction is final; but the bones of Israel are in the *open valley*, under the eye of Heaven, for there is *hope in their end*. [2.] He was made to own their case deplorable, and not to be helped by any power less than that of God himself (v. [3](#)): “Son of man, *can these bones live*? Is it a thing likely? Cast thou devise how it should be done? Can thy philosophy reach to put life into dry bones, or thy politics to restore a captive nation?” “No,” says the prophet, “I know not how it should be done, but *thou knowest*.” He does not say, “They cannot live,” lest he should seem to limit the Holy One of Israel; but, “Lord, thou knowest whether they can and whether they shall; if thou dost not put life into them, it is certain that they cannot life.” Note, God is perfectly acquainted with his own power and his own purposes, and will have us to refer all to them, and to see and own that his wondrous works are such as could not be effected by any counsel or power but his own.

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(2.) The means used for the bringing of these dispersed bones together and these dead and dry bones to life. It must be done by prophecy. Ezekiel is ordered to *prophesy upon these bones* (v. [4](#) and again v. [9](#)), to *prophesy to the wind*. So he *prophesied as he was commanded*, v. [7](#), [10](#). [1.] He must preach, and he did so; and the dead bones lived by a power that went along with the word of God which he preached. [2.] He must pray, and he did so; and the dead bones were made to live in answer to prayer; for *a spirit of life* entered into them. See the efficacy of the word and prayer, and the necessity of both, for the raising of dead souls. God bids his ministers *prophesy upon the dry bones*. Say unto them, *Live*; yea, say unto them, *Live*; and they do as they are commanded, calling to them again and again, *O you dry bones! hear the word of the Lord*. But we call in vain, still they are dead, still they are very dry; we must therefore be earnest with God in prayer for the working of the Spirit with the word: *Come, O breath!* and breathe upon them. God's grace can save souls without our preaching, but our preaching cannot save them without God's grace, and that grace must be sought by prayer. Note, Ministers must faithfully and diligently use the means of grace, even with those that there seems little probability of gaining upon. To prophesy upon dry bones seems as great a penance as to water a dry stick; and yet, whether they will hear or forbear, we must discharge our trust, must *prophesy as we are commanded*, in the name of him who raises the dead and is the fountain of life.

(3.) The wonderful effect of these means. Those that do as they are commanded, as they are commissioned, in the face of the greatest discouragements, need not doubt of success, for God will own and enrich his own appointments. [1.] Ezekiel looked down and prophesied upon the bones in the valley, and they became human bodies. *First*, That which he had to *say to them* was that God would infallibly raise them to life: *Thus saith the Lord God unto these bones, You shall live*, v. [5](#) and again v. [6](#). And he that speaks the word will thereby do the work; he that says, *They shall live*, will make them alive: He will *clothe them with skin and flesh* (v. [6](#)), as he did at first, [Job 10:11](#). He that made us so fearfully and wonderfully, and curiously wrought us, can in like manner new-make us, for *his arm is not shortened*. *Secondly*, That which was immediately done for them was that they were moulded anew into shape. We may well suppose it was with great liveliness and vigour that the prophet prophesied, especially when he found what he said begin to take effect. Note, The opening, sealing, and applying of the promises, are the ordinary means of our participation of a new and divine nature. As Ezekiel prophesied in this vision *there was a noise*, a word of command, from heaven, seconding what he said; or it signified the motion of the angels that were to be employed as the ministers of the divine Providence in the deliverance of the Jews, and we read of the *noise of their wings* ([Eze. 1:24](#)) and the *sound of their going*, [2 Sa. 5:24](#). *And, behold, a shaking*, or commotion, among the bones. Even dead and dry bones begin to move when they are called to hear the word of the Lord. This was fulfilled when, upon Cyrus's proclamation of liberty, those whose spirits God had stirred up began to think of making use of that liberty, and getting ready to be gone. When *there was a noise, behold, a shaking*; when David heard *the sound of the going on the tops of the mulberry-trees* then he *bestirred himself*; then there was *a shaking*. When Paul heard the voice saying, *Why persecutest thou me?* behold, a shaking of the dry bones; he *trembled* and was *astonished*. But this was not all: *The bones came together bone to his bone*, under a divine direction; and, though there is in man a multitude of bones, yet of all the bones of those numerous slain not one was missing, not one missed its way, not one missed its place, but, as it were by instinct, each knew and found its fellow. The dispersed bones came together and the displaced bones were knit together, the divine power supplying that to these dry bones which in a living body *every joint supplies*. Thus shall it be in the resurrection of the dead; the scattered atoms shall be ranged and marshalled in their proper place and order, and *every bone come* Henry, M. (1994). *Matthew Henry's commentary on the whole Bible: complete and unabridged in one volume*. Peabody: Hendrickson.

to his bone, by the same wisdom and power by which the bones were first *formed in the womb of her that is with child*. Thus it was in the return of the Jews; those that were scattered in several parts of the province of Babylon came to their respective families, and all as it were by consent to the general rendezvous, in order to their return. By degrees *sinews* and *flesh* came upon these bones, and the *skin covered them*, v. [8](#). This was fulfilled when the captives got their effects about them, and the *men of their place helped them with silver, and gold*, and whatever they needed for their remove, [Ezra 1:4](#). But still there was *no breath in them*; they wanted spirit and courage for such a difficult and hazardous enterprise as this was of returning to their own land. [2.] Ezekiel then looked up and prophesied to the *wind, or breath, or spirit*, and said, *Come, O breath! and breathe upon these slain*. As good have been still dry bones as dead bodies: but as for God *his work is perfect*; he is not the God of the dead, but of the living; therefore *breathe upon them that they may live*. In answer to this request, *the breath* immediately came *into them*, v. [10](#). Note, the spirit of life is from God; he at first in the creation breathed into man the breath of life, and so he will at last in the resurrection. The dispirited despairing captives were wonderfully animated with resolution to break through all the discouragements that lay in the way of their return and applied themselves to it with all imaginable vigour. And then they *stood upon their feet, an exceedingly great army*; not only living men, but effective men, fit for service in the wars and formidable to all that gave them any opposition. Note, With God nothing is impossible. He can *out of stones raise up children unto Abraham* and out of dead and dry bones levy an exceedingly great army to fight his battles and plead his cause.

II. The application of this vision to the present calamitous condition of the Jews in captivity: *These bones are the whole house of Israel*, both the ten tribes and the two. See in this what they are and what they shall be.

1. The depth of despair to which they are now reduced, v. [11](#). They all give up themselves for lost and gone; they say, *“Our bones are dried, our strength is exhausted, our spirits are gone, our hope is all lost; every thing we looked for succour and relief from fails us, and we are cut off for our parts*. Let who will cherish some hope, we see no ground for any.” Note, When troubles continue long, hopes have been often frustrated, and all creature-confidences fail, it is not strange if the spirits sink; and nothing but an active faith in the power, promise, and providence of God will keep them from quite dying away. 2. The height of prosperity to which, notwithstanding this, they shall be advanced: *“therefore, because things have come thus to the last extremity, prophesy to them, and tell them, now is God’s time to appear for them. Jehovah-jireh—in the mount of the Lord it shall be seen*, v. [12–14](#). Tell them,” (1.) “That they shall be brought out of the land of their enemies, where they are as it were buried alive: *I will open your graves*.” Those shall be restored, not only whose *bones are scattered at the grave’s mouth* ([Ps. 141:7](#)), but who are buried in the grave; though the power of the enemy is like the *bars of the pit*, which one would think it impossible to break through, strong as death and cruel as the grave, yet it shall be conquered. God can *bring his people up from the depths of the earth*, [Ps. 71:20](#). (2.) “That they shall be brought into their own land, where they shall live in prosperity: *I will bring you into the land of Israel* (v. [12](#)) and *place you there* (v. [14](#)), and will *put my spirit in you* and then *you shall live*.” Note, Then God puts spirit in us to good purpose, and so that we shall indeed live, when he puts his Spirit in us. And (*lastly*) in all this God will be glorified: *You shall know that I am the Lord* (v. [13](#)), and that I have *spoken it and performed it*, v. [14](#). Note, God’s quickening the dead redounds more than any thing to his honour, and to the honour of his word,

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which he has magnified above all his name, and will magnify more and more by the punctual accomplishment of every tittle of it.

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