



BSM CONNECT

The Bible Society of Malaysia

1st Issue 2016

The Dry Bones and the Word of God

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Introduction

Chapter 37 of the Book of Ezekiel starts with a terrifying scene. Imagine if you were Ezekiel, and you were taken into the center of a valley, all the sudden you realized that the valley was nothing, but full of bones! It reminds me of an earlier trip to Choeung Ek, codenamed Killing Field Number 10, the mass grave where countless human bones and teeth were found. It is a saddening experience to gaze at those bones, as bones reminds us of human weakness, cruelty, and failure. It is a symbol of death and the end of all things. Ezekiel the prophet saw many bones lying in the valley and these bones were not flesh bones, but they were very dry! The valley of dry bones to both Ezekiel and us is a state of death in utterly hopelessness.

Who are the bones? 'These bones are the whole house of Israel', said the Lord God to Ezekiel (v. 11a). In the timeline of the Davidic kingdom (1000-586 BCE), the nation of Israel was defeated by the Babylonians and taken exile after the defeat. To the exiles, their mindset was clear, 'our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are cut off completely' (v. 11b). Beyond the corporate identity of the ancient Israel, these words are reminiscent of the modern Malaysian Christians. We heard the similar words among ourselves: 'our economy has



turned from bad to worse', 'many have left us to seek for bright future from this country', 'the year 2016 is not a good year for Malaysians'. We need to address this issue: 'what do we place our faith and hope on?'

The Word of the Lord

At this juncture, the Lord spoke to the prophet Ezekiel, 'O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. Thus says the Lord God to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live.' (v.4-5) The role of a prophet is also a role of a speaker, and he is to speak as the Lord has instructed him. He is to convey the word of the Lord clearly and meaningful to the audience. He is a messenger who carries the message from the One who has sent Him. Ezekiel did precisely what the Lord has instructed him to do, and so he prophesied as he had been commanded (v. 7a).

The word of the Lord carries such an energetic power, even the dry bones who hears it obey it. Thus, the result of binding takes place: 'the bones came together, bone to its bone' and followed by the joining of sinews and the covering of the flesh and skin. From the reading of Ezekiel 37, the pictorial image is clear here. Dry bones are scattered piece by piece on the ground in the valley. They heard the voice of the Lord and obeyed, and thus they joined with each other to form the human body. However, to the end, there is fallen short of an important element: 'there was no breath in them' (v. 8).



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The body is ready but there is no breath in it! It is reminiscent of Genesis 2:7 in that while the first human (ha'adam) was made from the dust of the ground, it was the breath of God that made it a living being (nephesh hayah). Thus comes the second command from the Lord: "Prophecy to the breath, prophecy, O mortal! Say to the breath: Thus said the Lord God: Come, O breath, from the four winds, and breathe into these slain, that they may live again." (verse 9) For a second time Ezekiel obeyed and prophesied to summon the breath from four winds to enter into the dead bodies, and they became alive and formed a great army (hayil gadol).

It is clear from the reading of the Scripture that the 'born again' Israel comes from the two amazing and creative acts of the Lord. First, there is the adhesion of the bones and the frame of it with flesh and skin. Then there is the living-giving breath entrance of the body. For both occurrences, they begin with the command of the Lord to prophesize to the bones and to the breath from the four corners of the earth. It is just as the author of Hebrew puts it, 'Indeed, the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow.' (4:12)

The Explication of the Vision

It is clear from the Lord's explicative statement in verse 11 that the dry bones refer to the Israelites who had lost hope out of defeat, captive and exile. Also, in the words of the Lord, they are described as 'those who were slain' (harugim). The Lord promised to bring them out from the grave to the land of Israel so that they will truly know who the Lord is. Furthermore, the Lord will put His spirit within them and they shall live and be placed on your

own soil. As a result, they will also know that the Lord has spoken and has acted according to His word.

In the world today, there are valleys of bones around us. They are the people who are 'defeated', 'isolated' and 'marginalized' at one corner of the society. Perhaps at some point in time, we ourselves become 'dry bones' too! The only cure or remedy for it is to pick up the Bible, the word of the Lord, to read it again, and to read it reflectively. Let the Lord speaks to each one of them from His written word, the Bible. Let the Lord breathe on us, those bodies without living power, so that we can stand up on our feet and become a vast multitude. We can only see this urgency if we follow the footpath of Ezekiel and enter into our valleys of bones. Let the Lord speaks, and let those who hears it prophesize



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BIBLE SOCIETY of MALAYSIA

Sowing God's Word to Everyone in Every Way

BSM News and Event

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(1) We would like to express our heartfelt congratulation to our board President Bishop Ng Moon Hing for his recent installation as the Archbishop and the Primate of the South East Asia Province of the Anglican Church on 22nd February 2016. May God bless his new ministry.

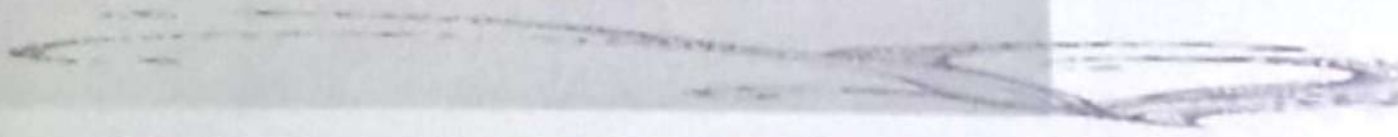
(2) The Acting General Secretary had attended the Chinese Scripture Forum of UBS, representing BSM, on 23-24 February 2016 in Ho Chi Minh City with participation from Hong Kong Bible Society, Bible Society of Singapore, Thailand Bible Society, Bible Society of Taiwan, China Partnership, British and Foreign Bible Society, and American Bible Society.

(3) The Acting General Secretary in collaboration with Bishop John Chew, and Mr Kua Wee Seng of China Partnership, has toured the three major cities of Sarawak, namely Kuching, Sibul, and Miri, to raise the profile of the Society and to share about the need for the existing projects of BSM. We had met various leaders of different denominations including the Anglican, the Methodist, the SIB, and an independent church in good fellowship.

(4) Bibles and Christian Literature to be given free! We have Murut Tagal Bibles to be given free to any Christians in either West Malaysia or East Malaysia and the recipient will only need to bear the delivery charges. Also, we have a colorful books written on the subject of Bible work, published by the China Partnership, entitled *The Bible Comes Alive*, to be given free to all Christians and churches who are interested in knowing the latest development of UBS's work in China. Anyone who are interested in them, please come to our office to get a copy or more.

(5) We are currently doing a Formal BM Bible, Iban Study Bible, Kayan Bible Revision. If any churches are interested in supporting any of these projects, please write to the Acting General Secretary, email: agshsm@gmail.com for further details, and a date to talk about it.

(6) The Board and the Staff of the Bible Society of Malaysia would like to express our Easter greetings to all our supporters and donors. May God bless you richly in this happy and blessed occasion, as we remember that Christ is risen from death. May the miracle of Easter bring you renewed hope, faith, love and joy.



Sowing God's Word to Everyone in Every Way