

The Living Word

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Bible readings for Sunday, May 23, 2021, with explanatory notes

Bible study on the Revised Common Lectionary readings for **May 23**

Prepare by reading the Bible passages beforehand – read again to reflect on the pulpit teaching

Theme: **Joy and confidence is God's reward for upholding His truth**

Ezekiel 37:1-14 – Vision of an expanse of dry bones coming to life

John 15:26-27; 16:4b-15 – The Spirit of Truth and Advocate is promised

Acts 2:1-21 – The Holy Spirit is poured out on the gathered believers

And also read: Psalm 104:24-34, 35b

Ezekiel 37:1-14 – Vision of an expanse of dry bones coming to life

*Ezekiel's word of hope for all who seek
God for renewal and restoration*

1-3 **The hand of the Lord was on me, and He brought me out by the Spirit of the Lord and set me in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. He led me to and fro among them, and I saw a great many bones on the floor of the valley, bones that were very dry. He asked me, "Son of man, can these bones live?"**

I said, "Sovereign Lord, You alone know."

"The hand of the Lord was on me" — Ezekiel's third and best-known vision is preceded by his word against harsh, ungodly leaders who provoked the nation's defeat and exile, Ezek. 34:1-7, then a word of hope with God's promise of resettlement, Ezek. 36:8-11. The return of the scattered exiles would be in a new heart and spirit imparted by the Holy Spirit, Ezek. 36:24-28.

"Can these bones live" – can this picture of such devastating defeat that no one was left to bury the corpses, become living people with a new hope in God? The bones can live if God decrees it; the real question is whether this is God's will.

• *For further study, see Ezekiel 36:26-27, 33, 35, 37-38.*

4-6 **Then He said to me, "Prophecy to these bones and say to them, 'Dry bones, hear the word of the Lord! This is what the Sovereign Lord says to these bones: I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life. I will attach tendons to you and make flesh come upon you and cover you with skin; I will put breath in**

you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the Lord.' "

"Breath enter you" – a word play where *ruach* conveys spirit and breath and wind.

• *For further study see Spirit, Ezek. 37:1,14; breath, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10; and wind or winds, 9. The same three meanings are in the Greek word pneuma of John 3:8.*

7-8 **So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I was prophesying, there was a noise, a rattling sound, and the bones came together, bone to bone. I looked, and tendons and flesh appeared on them and skin covered them, but there was no breath in them.**

"So I prophesied" – I declared in faith. Ezekiel is to speak God's truth and life into the slain.

"There was no breath" – connected bones, tendons and muscle require respiration to show life.

9-10 **Then he said to me, "Prophecy to the breath; prophesy, son of man, and say to it, 'This is what the Sovereign Lord says: come, breath, from the four winds and breathe into these slain, that they may live.' " So I prophesied as He commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet – a vast army.**

"From the four winds" — from every direction, a complete and powerful renewal.

11-12 **Then He said to me: "Son of man, these bones are the people of Israel. They say, 'Our bones are dried up and**

our hope is gone; we are cut off.' Therefore prophesy and say to them: "This is what the Sovereign Lord says: My people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them; I will bring you back to the land of Israel.

"Our bones are dried up" – Israel's hope had gone. From their perspective, there was no hope of being God's own people again.

13-14 "Then you, My people, will know

SUMMARY The deported Jews had been in Babylon for about ten years when the exile prophet Ezekiel received this picture.

APPLICATION The hope and prayer of every growing church, is that God will bestow the new life of His Spirit as a witness and attraction for others. This word is grounds for us to pray His will done, v.14.

QUESTION Can you think of any 'unlikely' places that have known historic revival?

John 15:26-27; 16:4b-15 – The Spirit of Truth and Advocate is promised

Jesus teaches what to expect when He is gone and the Holy Spirit comes

15:26-27 "When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father – the Spirit of Truth who goes out from the Father – He will testify about Me. And you also must testify, for you have been with Me from the beginning.

"When the Advocate comes" — the Holy Spirit is a person like the Father and the Son: the Spirit of God, Matthew 3:16, the Spirit of Christ, 1 Peter 1:11, and the revealing voice of Christ, vv. 14-15 below.

"Goes out from the Father" — of the same essence as the Father, sent to do the Father's work on earth.

16:4b-6 "I did not tell you this from the beginning because I was with you, but now I am going to Him who sent Me. None of you asks Me, 'Where are you going?' Rather, you are filled with grief because I have said these things.

"None of you asks" — this was now a timely question that should be asked.

7 "But very truly I tell you, it is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you.

"Unless I go away" — Jesus clearly taught that His saving work was necessary before the sending of the Spirit.

that I am the Lord, when I open your graves and bring you up from them. I will put My Spirit in you and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land. Then you will know that I the Lord have spoken, and I have done it, declares the Lord."

"I will put My Spirit in you and you will live" – the hope comes from the essential spiritual dimension, added to a political and geographical restoration.

• *For further study: on the Holy Spirit, a gift awaiting Jesus' glorification, John 7:37-39; 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:12-14.*

8-11 "When He comes, He will prove the world to be in the wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment: about sin, because people do not believe in Me; about righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see Me no longer; and about judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned.

"Prove the world to be in the wrong" – the NT emphasises the work of the Spirit in believers but this shows how He works more widely to bring awareness of the nature of sin i.e. the difference between self-righteousness and God's righteousness, both in believers and in the world.

12 "I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on His own; He will speak only what He hears, and He will tell you what is yet to come.

"The Spirit of Truth... will guide... into... the truth" – see John 14:26. The thrust of the gospel comes, not just by information but by revelation of truth (or reality). Jesus relied on this, John 5:19-20 and in the same way that Jesus could do

only what He saw His Father doing, the Holy Spirit will only speak what He hears.

14 -15 "He will glorify Me because it is from Me that He will receive what He will make known to you. All that

belongs to the Father is Mine. That is why I said the Spirit will receive from Me what He will make known to you."

"All that belongs to the Father is Mine" — the relationship between Father, Son and Holy Spirit is intimate, and they work in perfect unity.

SUMMARY Jesus sets out how it will work for His disciples when He goes and the Holy Spirit comes – steering them towards truth, and working in the world as well.

APPLICATION The Holy Spirit is our indispensable partner to make church dynamic, attractive and effective in its mission. As we pray the kingdom of God over others, He is released to work in their lives.

QUESTION *How much does your worship, your outreach and your prayer draw on a balanced awareness of Father, Son and Holy Spirit?*

Acts 2:1-21 – The Holy Spirit is poured out on the gathered believers

Formerly an anointing for individuals, now every believer can know His presence

1-4 When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place.

"Pentecost" – the fiftieth day after Passover was a festival to remember the covenants with Noah and Moses and the Giving of the Law.

2 Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

"A sound like... wind... and... tongues of fire" – the Spirit came with audible and visible signs, Ex. 19:16-18; 1 Kings 19:11- 12; Ezek. 37:9 (above)

"All of them" – not just the Twelve but the bigger group, men and women, see v.18 below

"Tongues" – languages; the spiritual gift of an unlearned praise and prayer language often comes with being filled with the Holy Spirit today.

5-6 Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken.

"Each one heard" — in the public gift of tongues today, sometimes a person of different ethnicity

will hear words of praise, often personal to them, in their own language.

7-12 Utterly amazed, they asked: "Aren't all these who are speaking Galileans?

Then how is it that each of us hears them in our native language? Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs – we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!" Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, "What does this mean?"

"Each of us hears" — Jerusalem was a city population of seven nations and three languages, visited by "God-fearing Jews from every nation", v.5, for the festival.

13 Some, however, made fun of them and said, "They have had too much wine."

"Some, however" — local Judeans, who didn't receive the sign of the dialects, rather than the Hellenic Jews from further afield, who did.

14-16 Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: "Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say. These people are not drunk, as you

suppose. It's only nine in the morning!

"Fellow Jews" — particularly the Judeans and Jerusalem dwellers.

16-18 "No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: 'In the last days, God says, I will pour out My Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams.

"Pour out My Spirit on all people" — in the OT the Holy Spirit anointed individuals as righteous kings, prophets, craftsmen etc. The promise being fulfilled here, was for Spirit-filled people, male and female, young and older, all gaining a Holy Spirit-inspired confidence in God's guidance and ways.

18 " 'Even on My servants, both men and women, I will pour out My Spirit in

those days, and they will prophesy.

"They will prophesy" – speaking out for God, more with the sense of forth-telling than foretelling.

19 " 'I will show wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and billows of smoke. The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord.

"Wonders... and signs" — of the future consummation of the kingdom.

21 " 'And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.' "

"Everyone who calls will be saved" – anyone can turn to Jesus, and the Holy Spirit adds to their good intent the faith for salvation, Matt. 7:21.

SUMMARY On the fiftieth day after Passover the Twelve and their friends were together, probably in the temple courts, when a roar like a storm and a manifestation of flames drew a crowd. The Spirit on the disciples provoked ecstatic praise in unlearned languages, so that Jews visiting from around the Mediterranean heard God being extolled in their own dialects. Peter then explains how this fulfils what Joel foretold as a sign of the beginning of the Last Days.

APPLICATION With Jesus' sacrificial death on the Cross and His Resurrection to new life, the bestowal of the Holy Spirit without distinction of race, gender or religious standing, is the mark of Christian believers. The Cross defines our redemption, the Resurrection defines the new life under Jesus' ever-present lordship and the giving of the Spirit defines our inclusion and empowering for ministry and mission. It's not a choice – we need it all.

QUESTION *Thinking about the crowd that gathered, very mixed and not all Jews, what is the significance of Pentecost for not-yet-Christians?*

PRAYER Father God, You gave Yourself in Jesus, and You poured out Yourself in the giving of Your Spirit, not selectively but for all who would receive.

In this Pentecost season, may we be ever open to receive more of Your Spirit in a new refreshing, and to be giving away more of Your love, and life, and light in our daily interactions.

Honouring Jesus we pray, Amen.

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