

# DESTINED TO RISE

## The divine pattern of restoration for the Body of Christ

Our present age is to come to its climax with “the period of restoration of all things”, during which—at a moment never precisely revealed—Jesus Christ will return from heaven to earth (see Acts 3:19–21). Today, there are many different factors, all of which point to the fact that we have already entered this period. Restoration suggests two main activities: putting things back into their right place and into their right condition.

At this time the process of divine restoration centers mainly in God’s two covenant peoples in the earth: Israel and the Church. For many long centuries Israel has wandered as exiles, far from their God-given geographical inheritance at the east end of the Mediterranean. For an almost equal period, the Church of Jesus Christ has lived in similar exile, far from its God-given spiritual inheritance, the main elements of which are: unity, authority, an ordered community life, the complete ministries of Ephesians 4:11, fullness of spiritual gifts and abundance of spiritual fruit.



**During** the Old Testament period, the Church was a “mystery”—a secret that was kept hidden from ages and from generations and then revealed to the apostles and prophets of the New Testament. (See Ephesians 3:3–9; Colossians 1:25–27.) There is therefore little or no direct prophecy concerning the Church in the Old Testament.

Nevertheless, when rightly understood, the Old Testament prophecies have much to tell us about the period of the Church’s restoration. For all the principles that are unfolded in the natural realm of Israel’s restoration are equally applicable to the Church’s restoration in the spiritual realm. When we use this method of interpretation, we can see very clearly that the parallel restoration of Israel in the natural and of the Church in the spiritual has been proceeding—step by step and phase by phase—from the beginning of the twentieth century until today.

### THE VALLEY OF DRY BONES

One prophecy that very vividly foretells the restoration of both Israel and the Church is found in Ezekiel 37:1–10—the vision of the valley of dry bones:

*The hand of the LORD came upon me and brought me out in the Spirit of the LORD, and set me down in the midst of the valley; and it was full of bones. Then He caused me to pass by them all around, and behold, there were very many in the open valley; and indeed they were very dry. And He said to me, “Son of man, can these bones live?” So I answered, “O Lord GOD, You know.”*

*Again He said to me, “Prophecy to these bones, and say to them, ‘O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD! Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones; “Surely I will cause breath to enter into you, and you shall live. I will put sinews on you and bring flesh upon you, cover you with skin and put breath in you; and you shall live. Then you shall know that I am the LORD.””*

*So I prophesied as I was commanded; and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and suddenly a rattling; and the bones came together, bone to bone. Indeed, as I looked, the sinews and the flesh came upon them, and the skin covered them over; but there was no breath in them.*

*Also He said to me, “Prophecy to the breath, prophesy, 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.””*

*So I prophesied as He commanded me, and breath came into them, and they lived, and stood up upon their feet, an exceedingly great army.*

At the start of this vision, God’s people are pictured as dry, disjointed, scattered bones. There follow two phases of restoration. In the first phase, the bones are supernaturally moved upon, brought together and fitted together by joints. Then ligaments, muscles, flesh and skin cover them. At the end of this phase the bodies are all physically complete, but they have no breath. In the second phase, breath (or Spirit) comes into the bodies and they stand up on their feet.

At the end of this phase God’s final objective has been achieved: “an exceedingly great army.”

In this vision of Israel’s restoration, the initiative and the plan come from God, but He uses Ezekiel as His human instrument to bring it to pass. This applies equally to the Church. Restoration is God’s sovereign purpose, clearly foretold in Scripture. But God will use men whom He Himself chooses and raises up to bring it to pass.

In the vision of the bones Ezekiel’s prophesying takes two different forms. In the first instance he prophesies directly to the bones. This we may compare to preaching. In the second instance he prophesies to the breath (Spirit) on behalf of the bodies and the Spirit in turn enters the bodies. This we may compare to intercessory prayer.

### THE IMPORTANCE OF JOINTS

The importance of correctly fitted joints, as applied to the Body of Christ, is emphasized in the New Testament. In Ephesians 4:15–16 Paul says that God’s purpose for us is that we may **“grow up in all things into Him who is the head—even Christ—from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effectual working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.”**

Paul tells us here that joints serve two purposes. First, by them the body is “knit [compacted, KJV]”—made firm and strong. No matter how strong individual bones in a body may be, their ability to operate effectively is limited by the strength of the joints that unite them. If, under stress or pressure, the joints give way, the whole body is left weak and ineffective. Secondly, the joints are the channels of supply. If these channels are not kept clear and functional, the total needs of the body will not be met.

In the early church the joints were in good order and the result was **“Nor was there anyone among them who lacked”** (Acts 4:34). This is not true of the contemporary church. God’s supply has never changed. He is still **“able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work”** (2 Corinthians 9:8). But because of defective or improper joints, many Christians today are not receiving their share of God’s supply. There are many among us that lack in various areas of their lives—spiritual, emotional, physical, financial, or social.

In Colossians 2:18–19 Paul speaks of believers who are led away into spiritual error, and he explains that this happens because they are **“not holding fast to the Head, from whom all the body, nourished and knit together by joints and ligaments, grows with the increase that is from God.”**

“Joints are the channel of supply”

### TAKEN FROM A NEW WINE ARTICLE NOVEMBER 1977.

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Paul here indicates the two main requirements for being preserved from error: first, to be firmly united with the Head (Christ); second, to be firmly united, “by joints and ligaments,” with our fellow believers. Our personal relationship to Christ is primary, but it is not sufficient by itself. There must be a rightly established relationship with the other believers to whom God has joined us in the Body.

## THE LIGAMENTS OF COVENANT

In the natural body ligaments are the bands of tissue that hold bones together at the point where they are joined. Thus, the strength of any joint is never greater than that of the ligament that holds it together. In the Body of Christ, “joints” are the interpersonal relationships between believers whom God joins together. But what is the “ligament” needed to keep each joint strong and secure? The answer, I believe, is covenant commitment.

In the Bible we find examples of covenants that are merely agreements or contracts on the plane of normal life between two or more human persons: for example, between Laban and Jacob (Genesis 31:43–54); or between Solomon and Hiram (1 Kings 5:8–12). However, there is a higher form of covenant in which God is the first party. A covenant such as this is sovereignly initiated by God Himself, then accepted and entered into by the human party or parties. Both the “Old” and “New” Covenants belong to this category. In this higher sense, we may define covenant as “a solemn, reciprocal commitment between God and a human person or persons, initiated by God Himself, accepted and ratified by the human party or parties.”

In such a covenant each of the parties has his clearly defined obligations. In both the Old and New Covenants, God voluntarily obligated Himself to save, preserve, protect and provide for His covenant people. However, on the human side, the obligations under the two Covenants differed. Under the Old Covenant, man’s obligation was to observe the Law of Moses. Under the New Covenant, man’s obligation is to believe in and obey the Lord Jesus Christ.

Among the Semitic peoples portrayed in the Bible, a normal way for two parties to enter into a covenant was to share a solemn meal together, and in particular to break bread from one loaf and drink from one cup. For this reason it was appropriate for Jesus to initiate the New Covenant at a solemn meal in which each person broke bread from the same loaf and drank wine from the same cup (see Matthew 26:26–28). By this one act all who participated in it were thereafter bound together in a sacred covenant. Ever since then, partaking of the Lord’s Supper has been—in God’s sight—a renewal of this covenant by which all who participate are bound to the Lord and to each other.

On the human plane, what are the mutual obligations of those who break bread and drink wine together in the Lord’s Supper? Let me answer this question by applying it

personally to my own life. If I share the Lord’s Supper with you, by that act I acknowledge that you are my brother or sister, a member of the same divine family. I obligate myself to love you, care for you, and seek your highest well-being—if need be, to lay down my life for you. If you have any legitimate need that you cannot meet but I can, then my supply becomes your supply. If you suffer, I suffer with you. If you are honored, I rejoice with you.

Furthermore, my covenant obligations are not limited to you personally. They extend also to those with whom you are in covenant. If A is in covenant with B, and B with C, then by that fact A is also in covenant with C, and C with A. This explains how covenant commitments, like ligaments, can bind all the bones in the Body of Christ together. Each bone is directly bound to the ones next to it, but those in turn are bound to others. Thus all the bones are bound together to form one body.

## CONSEQUENCES OF A BROKEN COVENANT

The obligations of covenant are so solemn that failure to observe them carries with it the most serious consequences. This was the crowning guilt of Judas Iscariot. He first partook of the bread with Jesus, then went out and betrayed Him. David graphically portrays this in Psalm 41:9: **“Even my own familiar friend in whom I trusted, who ate of my bread, has lifted up his heel against me.”** Judas was doubly guilty in that he first ate bread with Jesus then betrayed Him.

Likewise, Paul reminds the Christians at Corinth of the danger of partaking of the Lord’s Supper without a sincere and solemn commitment to accept the obligations it imposes, both to the Lord and to each other. **“For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment [damnation] to himself, not discerning the Lord’s body. For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep”** (1 Corinthians 11:29–30). These believers “did not discern the Lord’s body” in that they failed to see that, by celebrating the Lord’s Supper together, they were acknowledging a covenant commitment to each other that bound them together like bones bound by ligaments in a single body.

One result of their failure to honor their covenant commitments was that many of them were weak and sick and some had died prematurely. Here is one obvious explanation for similar conditions that exist among many Christians today. Christians who are not prepared to accept the covenant obligation implicit in celebrating the Lord’s Supper would do better not to celebrate it at all.

**The majority of Christians in our Western civilization have scarcely any understanding of what is entailed by covenant commitment. The most familiar example of a covenant among us today is marriage. This is a solemn commitment made by a man and a woman, before God, to share their lives totally together. It is “for better or for worse, for richer or for poorer, in sickness and in health, ‘till death us do part.” In other words, once entered into, it is in no way dependent**

# GUESS WHAT?

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upon moods, emotions or circumstances. In marriage, the result of a broken covenant is divorce and the break-up of the home. In Christianity, the result is jealousy, rivalry, division, broken fellowship: conditions that leave the Body of Christ too weak and disjointed to function effectively.

## THE MUSCLES OF MINISTRY

In the building up of the natural body, ligaments are logically followed by muscles. Muscles vary in nature and function, but in most cases they operate on two basic principles: tension and opposition. For instance—to use the example of my arm—one set of muscles on the inner side pulls my arm into a bent position; another set of muscles on the opposite side extends my arm into a straight position. This combination of tension and opposition keeps the arm healthy

“[We] need tension and opposition to operate effectively”

and enables it to operate effectively. When the opposing tensions cease, the arm is in fact paralyzed.

In the Body of Christ the function of muscles is fulfilled by the many different kinds of ministries God provides. These ministries, just like muscles, need tension and opposition to operate effectively. For many years I did not see this. I was inwardly afraid of tension

or opposition within the Body of Christ. I pictured unity as a condition in which every part functioned exactly alike. I realize now that if such a condition were ever achieved it would not be unity but paralysis.

When we understand this need for tension and opposition between ministries, it becomes much easier to view the uniting of Christ's Body as a practical possibility that really can be achieved. Things that at first seemed inconsistent with unity are now seen to be necessary to the proper functioning of the Body as a whole.

What are some main tensions that confront us in the Christian scene today? We may list them under two main headings: first, those found between denominations or other groups; second, those found between individual believers.

### A. Between Denominations:

1. Fixed-form vs. spontaneous worship
2. Institutional vs. Charismatic

3. Tradition vs. immediate truth
4. Individual vs. plurality of leadership

### B. Between Individuals:

1. Outgoing vs. reflective
2. Impulsive vs. cautious
3. Inspirational vs. analytical
4. Mystical/prophetic vs. practical/administrative
5. Evangelistic outreach vs. pastoral care

**What a relief to see that, in all the opposing points listed above, we do not have to choose one at the expense of the other! In each case, the total body needs both. The tension and opposition between them is the key to the Body's activity and flexibility. However, it is necessary to emphasize that, logically, the ligaments of covenant must be in place before the Body can be exposed to the opposing tensions of the muscles of ministry. If the bones are not first secured by covenant commitment, then the tensions of different ministries will pull them apart, leaving the Body disjointed and ineffective. A great many of our problems in contemporary Christianity are due to the fact that ministries are operating among believers who have not first been related to each other by covenant.**

## THE FINAL PHASE

Once ligaments and muscles are in place, flesh and skin follow naturally, producing a complete body, fully rounded out. Without going into details, we may suggest that the filling out of the flesh represents the development of all the activities and relationships that make up the total life of a Christian community. Thereafter, the skin represents the various ways in which such a community makes direct contact with the world around it.

In closing, we need to turn back to Ezekiel's vision for a final, important lesson. In the first phase, God moved supernaturally upon individual bones to bring them together into bodies. But in the second phase God moved only upon completed bodies.

**In the present phase of the church, God is still fitting individual believers together in bodies—that is, local churches. But once this phase is complete, then, in the raising up of His “exceeding great army,” God will no longer deal with isolated individual believers, but only with completed bodies—that is, completed local churches. Therefore every believer should ensure at this time to make sure that he finds his God-appointed place in a local Body. Otherwise, the final phase, when it comes, will pass him by. ▲**

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# DESTINED TO RISE

## STUDY GROUP RESOURCE

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CONSIDER

### OVERVIEW

**T**he restoration of the Body of Christ has two activities: putting things in the right place & in the right condition. Currently the Church is living far from its spiritual inheritance—i.e. unity, spiritual authority, ordered community life, and much more.

### LEADER'S GUIDE: IN THIS STUDY WE WILL:

- Read and discuss Ezekiel's vision.
- Consider the different roles in the Body of Christ and their importance.
- Reflect upon roles within the church and what God has requested of us as individuals.
- Take communion together & pray.

### YOU WILL NEED:

1. Bibles & individual journals
2. Large & small pieces of paper
3. Pens, pencils or markers etc.
4. Basic communion supplies

**SCRIPTURES:** Ezekiel 37:1-10; Ephesians 3:3-9; 4:11; 4:15-16; Acts 3:20-21; 4:34; Colossians 1:25-27; 2:18-19; Genesis 31:43-54; Matthew 26:26-28; Psalm 41:9.

### 1 THE VALLEY OF DRY BONES



- Read aloud the vision told in Ezekiel 37:1-10, sharing the reading of the verses between each group member. (Consider reading from an alternative Bible translation.)
- As it is read, encourage the group to imagine the vision taking place in their mind's eye, as if they were the ones receiving the vision for the first time.

### 2 THE IMPORTANCE OF JOINTS



READ: Eph 4:15-16

- What are the joints within our church community?
- Brainstorm on a large piece of paper and find things that are done, that we have never considered before.

- Without trying to pull down your individual church, are there joints that are lacking or that are weak? Is this a prayer point or something we can help to strengthen—whilst still holding fast to the Head, who is Christ?
- READ Col 2:18-19 and discuss together how can we be sure we are joined/connected to the Head?

### 3 THE LIGAMENTS OF COVENANT



**Under the New Covenant made by God through Jesus dying on the cross for us, our obligation to meet the covenant agreement is simple - we are to believe and obey the Lord Jesus Christ. Covenant relationship has a high call and is something we are not used to in our culture. How can we better adopt this covenant relationship with each other?**

- In journals or on individual pieces of paper, let each person consider how they are currently obeying God. What specific things are they being obedient to—what has God spoken to them about, and they are holding fast to Him, to believe for no lack and provision?

### 4 THE FINAL PHASE



- Now as a group have communion together. This is an act of committing to the covenant between us and God, and us and other believers. By partaking in the Lord's supper, we are therefore binding ourselves to care and look after one another.
- During communion, as individuals reflect upon the covenant obligation to each other as Christians and our obedience to Christ and plan for humanity to know the fullness of His love. Share your revelations.

**PRAY** together for your church, for needs to be met, for faith and determination to hold fast to Christ when meeting others needs, and wisdom to understand that tension and opposition with the body of Christ is part of the muscles of ministry.

Derek  
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ISSUE #011

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