

The Rest of the Verses

Ezekiel 37:1-14, Hebrews 10:32-39, Psalm 14, John 4:27-38, Revelation 1:9-20, 1 Thessalonians 4:15-18

Slide 1 - Introduction

Today we finish our journey through the song, "*Days of Elijah.*" While there may be one or two lines that I could force a whole message out of, I found that for most of them, I'd be stretching it.

So, instead we'll look at the last of the remaining phrases separately.

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This first phrase, "*These are the days of Ezekiel, the dry bones becoming as flesh,*" come from Ezekiel 37:1-14,

This one is quite interesting because it clearly speaks of revival; of God taking remnants that were dead and making them to be His people in all their splendor and blessings.

As an aside it should be noted that the events prophesied here in Ezekiel 37 were supposed to happen in the days of Ezekiel.

The Valley of Dry Bones was a vision of things that would happen in the future. So, these "*days of Ezekiel*" refer to the promise of revival rather than the reality of revival.

Regardless, this passage basically establishes that the song is about revival.

The meaning we can take from this is that situations are never hopeless since God's constantly wanting to breathe new life into dry bones.

Do you sometimes feel like dry bones, like there's no joy left, that everything you try fails and God seems to be nowhere? This would be the time to remember that God has the power to restore new life.

By saying, "*These are the days,*" we're saying that God's moving among us, that the time of dryness is at an end, and that God's doing something new and life-bringing among us.

However, the passage also contains a warning. This is something that God must do and not something we can accomplish by ourselves.

We don't make this true by declaring it to be so. When we see the evidence of God moving in the world, then we can declare it to be true.

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The next phrase comes from Hebrews 10:32-39, "*And though these are days of great trial, of famine and darkness and sword,*"

This is a reminder that times of revival or renewal, when God's Spirit moves, aren't necessarily trouble free. In fact, more often than not they're times of trouble.

However, I believe that the Bible teaches that there's a link between times of suffering or prosperity and God's approval or a moving of the Holy Spirit.

One of the big problems I have with some of the Christian TV channels is that quite often they promote what's known as a "*Prosperity*" gospel or a "*Name It and Claim It*" gospel.

The idea being that, if we follow God, as we should, then all things will go well for us. We will be healthy, wealthy, and wise.

If you look at the churches that the people who buy into this philosophy frequent, they're usually full of healthy and wealthy people. So, is this "*Name It and Claim It*" gospel real?? No!

Why not? Because those people who aren't healthy and wealthy can only take so much of "*you don't have enough faith*" or "*repent of your hidden sin*" before they move to a more Biblically based church or abandon God altogether.

The truth is that sometimes God chooses to heal us and sometimes He doesn't. Sometimes God sends prosperity our way, sometimes He doesn't.

It's a fact that for many people, when they become Christians, their financial situation does improve.

But this is often due to their giving up wasting all their money on gambling, alcohol, and becoming more responsible with their lives and money.

There's no guarantee, though. Christians can and do suffer financially. Christians get sick and die of diseases, but this is not to be taken as proof that their faith is small or they're sinners.

If financial success bears any kind of relation to spirituality, then, as a group, pastors must be the most unspiritual people within the church.

Not to mention the fact that Jesus Himself must have been really wicked given His financial situation.

However, we don't need to be that extreme to have something of the same attitude in our lives.

I read a sermon loosely based on the book, *“The Prayer of Jabez.”* The author talked about how God wants to give us all these blessings, but we don’t get them because we don’t ask for them.

The problem is, when we buy into this, we begin to see God’s blessing as the material things in our life and this kind of mentality is very dangerous.

Sometimes God blesses us materially and sometimes he doesn’t. It doesn’t mean we’re any less spiritual. But if we understand blessings to mean Spiritual blessings, does that make it okay?

Well, possibly but what do you mean by Spiritual blessings. Does it mean you’re always going to be happy. No. In fact, I’m not even sure it means freedom from depression.

It doesn’t mean that every worship service you go to you’re going to come away feeling “blessed,” which we usually translate to feeling happy.

What it does mean is that we’ll grow closer to God. We’ll become more Christ-like, getting more and more victory over sin, but here’s where it gets harder.

You see, we tend to get the idea that there’s a nice “HOW-TO” about growing our church. In other words, if we just follow a few simple steps, have enough faith, then our church will grow.

Unfortunately, this isn’t true. Having a Spiritual church is not a guarantee of having a growing church. Even if we did everything right there’s no guarantee our church would grow.

Now don’t get me wrong, if we’re not growing, we need to do all we can to grow.

Sometimes that means saying, *“Well, we’ve tried the same thing for the past 10 years and it hasn’t worked, so it’s time we tried something new,”* but success is never guaranteed.

In most cases a Spiritual church, a church that’s working hard at outreach, will grow but not always.

Sometimes we face days of famine, darkness, and sword but that’s not necessarily a sign that we’re doing things wrong, although it could be.

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Next, Psalm 14 tells us that, *“Out of Zion’s hill salvation comes.”*

So where or what is Zion? What does Zion’s hill have to do with salvation?

Well, Zion is basically just another name for Jerusalem. In fact, Zion and Jerusalem are used synonymously in the Bible.

In Hebrew poetry, which often uses two lines to say the same thing twice in slightly different ways, you’ll often see things like: *“Daughters of Jerusalem do something, Daughters of Zion do the same thing.”*

Now I could give you a long history of these two words and how they came to be the name for the city, but I know you want to get to lunch, so I’ll just give you the short version.

While Jerusalem and Zion basically mean the same thing theologically, Zion came to be associated with the mountain on which Jerusalem was built, hence the frequent mentions to mount Zion or Zion’s hill.

Zion is also talked about in relation to heaven. This arises from the fact that there are a lot of prophecies about what Zion or Jerusalem was supposed to be like: a great haven of peace, security, and true worship of the one God.

However, the real Jerusalem was seldom like this and was often the seat of corruption and idolatry.

This gave rise to the idea of a heavenly city or a heavenly Jerusalem. A city of peace, security, and the true worship of God.

Revelation even finishes with the New Jerusalem descending out of heaven to be the dwelling place of God on the new earth.

Jerusalem is commonly recognized as an earthly city while not many people are aware of what Zion means.

Zion is more closely associated with the New Jerusalem and heaven, although, as with Jerusalem, it really refers to both.

Therefore, what does the line "*Out of Zion's hill salvation comes*" mean. There are two psalms that talk about God's salvation coming from Zion, Psalm 14 and Psalm 53.

Basically, the idea in these Psalms is that the human race is corrupt and the psalmist longs for God to come and rescue the righteous. The psalmist identifies this salvation coming from Zion.

Well, what does this mean? First, Zion or Jerusalem was seen as the seat of Israel's true king who was descended from David.

Thus, we could have some sort of messianic message here. The psalmist could be looking for the true King to come and set things right. The problem with this view is that David wrote the psalm.

Another possibility is that Zion is the place of the temple, which is the dwelling place of God on earth. Although again we face the problem that this psalm was written before the temple was built.

But in the time of David, Zion was associated with the location of the Ark of the Covenant. The Ark symbolized the presence of God since that's where He dwelt in the Temple.

God's dwelling place on earth was associated with Jerusalem/Zion and therefore the salvation that was to come, would come from God.

However, it takes on a new meaning for Christians as Jerusalem or Zion was the place where Jesus died and rose again. In particular, Zion's hill may be referring to this.

Therefore "*out of Zion's hill*" refers to the fact that salvation is to be found in Jesus because of His death and resurrection.

Slide 5

Then we have the phrase, "*These are the days of the harvest, the fields are as white in the world, and we are the laborers in the vineyard, declaring the word of the Lord.*"

Here the writer of this song draws on the words of Jesus from John 4. It's in this chapter where Jesus explains that now is the time of the harvest, that people are just waiting to become Christians.

Therefore, all we need to do is go and harvest them, by preaching the Word of the Lord.

This was certainly true in the time of Jesus and the early church where the church literally exploded onto the world scene, going from an obscure sect of Judaism to the official religion of the Roman Empire in only 300 years.

It's certainly true today in Africa, South America, and Korea, but are the fields really white, is it the days of harvest?

For many it may appear not. Churches are shrinking and closing. People aren't being saved. We haven't really "exploded" recently. So, can we really say the fields are ready for harvest?

Yes, we can. I believe people are crying out for the message of salvation, for a relationship with God.

Despite what some people say, we're not a secular society. Belief in all sorts of religions, superstitions, and faiths are rampant.

Even a majority of those who don't actively practice a religion believe in God or at least something out there.

The trouble is they're looking in the wrong place and the church isn't giving them the answer.

We're told to go into the fields and harvest. We're not to wait for the wind to blow the grain through the barn doors. We have a message that's the answer to what people are crying for but we're not delivering it.

Churches are in decline because they're not making a real attempt to reach people. They either expect people to just walk in or they talk about things in a way that non-Christians don't understand.

Yes, some churches are in decline, but others are growing, not by compromising or changing the message but by going to the people, meeting their needs, and showing them that God and the church care and can do something for them.

The fields are ready to harvest, the question is, "*Are we ready to do what it takes to reap the harvest?*"

Slide 6

Conclusion

Finally, we come to the phrase, *“Behold He comes riding on the clouds, shining like the sun at the trumpet call.”* This image comes from Revelation 19 and 1 Thessalonians 4.

Imagery is often associated with Christ’s Second Coming, and this is what’s meant here, particularly when associated with a trumpet call.

The writer of this song is using this phrase to refer to the Second Coming as it’s traditionally understood. But even this is up to theological debate.

Matthew 24:29-31 states, *“Immediately after the tribulation of those days... They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory.”*

So, if this interpretation is to be true, you’re a post-tribulation believer. If you believe Jesus will return before the tribulation, then this passage doesn’t apply.

While in Acts Jesus ascends into the air and is hidden by a cloud and the disciples are told that Christ will return in the same way.

Yet, 1 Thessalonians 4:15-18 says, *“For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command.”* No mention of clouds.

As for the imagery of riding on a horse, that comes from Revelation 19:11-16, *“Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war.”*

The “*Shining like the sun,*” is a reference to the description of Jesus found in Revelation 1, which contains lots of metaphors to describe various aspects of Jesus’ character.

“*Shining like the sun,*” speaks of Christ’s holiness. Try looking directly at the sun and you’ll find you can’t, and you shouldn’t because it can blind you.

When we read the description of Jesus in Revelation 1, there’s a great deal about the intensity or holiness of God.

But notice also, this awesome God, this One who you can’t even look at, says “*Don’t be afraid.*” He even invites us to be with Him. The unapproachable God made approachable by what Jesus did.

Again, this imagery isn’t particularly associated with Christ’s return other than it’s in Revelation. However, when Christ returns, I believe we’ll see Him like this.

But what’s the significance of Christ’s return in the context of revival. In 2 Peter we’re told that we can hurry the day of Christ’s return by seeing others won to Christ, but is that all there is to it?

Well, sort of. The return of Jesus is the goal towards which we should be working. The time when the world will truly be revived, when all will see, and all will serve.

We just need to do as much as possible to get people to recognize Christ before then.

It’s worth persevering in the times of darkness, famine, and the sword, because Jesus is coming again. Since it will all be worth it in the end, when Christ returns and sets up His kingdom for ever and ever. Amen!