

6pm Sunday 27 September 2026

Ezekiel 37:15-end (and 1 John 2:22-end): It is God who heals, who makes us whole and who brings us home

God tells Ezekiel what to say when the Israelites say *Will you not show us what you mean by these?*

We know, of course, that the Israelites don't really need to be told what Ezekiel's visual aid means. It is perfectly obvious what is being illustrated by Ezekiel's visual aid. Against all the odds, Ezekiel's sticks are showing that two groups of people are going to be brought together and reunited into one group.

On the one hand you have the people of the huge tribe of Judah, who live in the southernmost part of the promised land, around Jerusalem. Judah became the natural leader of Jacob's twelve sons.

And on the other you have the people of the other tribes of Israel, to the north of Jerusalem. Although the rivalry was between the tribes of Judah and Joseph, the northern kingdom has been more commonly known by the name of Ephraim (Ephraim being one of Joseph's two sons).

David was king of one kingdom, and Solomon his son also ruled over one kingdom. But things fell apart in the time of Rehoboam, the headstrong king who refused to follow his counsellors' wise advice. It was not long before Israel in the north, and Judah in the south were at war with one another.

By the time of Ezekiel, Israel and Judah are two kingdoms and have been divided, for many generations. The people of Israel in the north have been driven out of their homeland, out of Samaria, by successive waves of aggression from the Assyrian Empire. Now the Assyrian Empire is on the wane but there's a new super-power in the form of the Babylonian Empire and Babylon has its sights set on Jerusalem.

By the time of Ezekiel, to think of Israel and Judah as re-united is as crazy, as far-fetched, as thinking about an undivided Cyprus. Or of Ireland under a single president, with no part of Ireland remaining as part of the United Kingdom.

As impossible to imagine as North and South Korea becoming a single country again.

So when the Israelites say to Ezekiel *will you not show us what you mean?* They are not really asking Ezekiel *Tell us what you are saying is going to happen?* They've heard Ezekiel not just *telling* them, but *showing* them what is going to happen. Their problem with it is that they simply don't believe it can happen. Their real question is *why should we believe this?* But God is faithful; God does keep his promises; and God wants us, too, to know that we can trust him.

So when the people ask Ezekiel, *how is this going to happen?* God tells Ezekiel how is to answer. It will be God himself who will achieve the impossible. For of course, as Mary said to the angel Gabriel, *nothing will be impossible with God.*

Did you notice, in that reading, how many times you heard *I will do this?*

...I will make them one stick; I will take the people of Israel from the nations; I will gather them from every quarter; I will bring them to their own land; I will make them one nation.
And how many times you heard God talk about ***my hand, my people, my servant David, my sanctuary, my dwelling-place, my sanctuary?***

Seventeen times, God says ***I will do this....***

Nine times, God says ***my*** this, ***my*** that....

And what does God do?

It is God who heals his people, who makes whole his people, and who brings home his people.

The Israelites had gone really, really wrong; their kings had made truly terrible allegiances that had done them no good at all; they had been led astray into all kinds of highly unhealthy religious practices, and yet God still calls them ***my people***. God stays faithful to them, even if they have not been faithful to him. God says ***I will save them from all the apostasies into which they have fallen, and I will cleanse them. They shall be my people, and I will be their God.***

And God is still the one who heals his people. In Greek, the same word means “save”, it also means “heal”, and it also means “rescue”.

It does not matter how far we have gone from God; what we have done; we are forgiven people because on the cross Jesus paid the price for our our self-centredness and our sinfulness.

It is God who heals his people. In sending his son Jesus to die for our sake, God has saved us, he has rescued us, and he will heal us.

It is God who makes his people whole. We might be broken, there have been tough times that have taken their toll and knocked us about and left us so hardened by difficulties that we feel that we are no longer capable of experiencing tenderness or love. But God can restore us.

It is God who brings us home. God promises the Israelites ***[to] take them from the nations among which they have gone, [to] gather them from every quarter, and bring them to their own land.*** And God promises ***[he] will set my sanctuary among them for evermore [and] my dwelling-place shall be with them [and] my sanctuary is among them for evermore.***

That’s a promise that the Israelites would interpret as one that was fulfilled in purely physical and material terms, with the return of the Israelites to Jerusalem and with the rebuilding of Jerusalem, and of its walls, and the building of the Second Temple.

It is only from this side of the cross, after the death and resurrection of Jesus, that we can see how God would fulfil this promise to his people to come and make his dwelling-place with them.

And it is only after the coming of the Holy Spirit that we can understand how God could keep his promise to his people to give us a sanctuary, how he will enable us to know the peace of God that passes all understanding; and how he will uncover the Truth that will set us free; the Life that has been exchanged to redeem us from slavery to sin; and the Way that will bring us home to heaven.