

# FULTON COUNTY GOSPEL NEWS

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## **HARD TO BE UNDERSTOOD - PSALM 51:5**

*Barry O'Dell*

**D**avid wrote, "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me" (Ps. 51:5). On this verse the reformer, John Calvin wrote,

"He [David] now proceeds further than the mere acknowledgement of one or of many sins, confessing that he brought nothing but sin with him into the world, and that his nature was entirely depraved...the passage affords a striking testimony in proof of original sin entailed by Adam upon the whole human family...but the Bible, both in this and other places, clearly asserts that we are born in sin, and that it exists within us as a disease fixed in our nature."

It seems that from Calvin's time until today that many have bought into the belief of "original sin" or "total depravity." While this doctrine had adherents before the time of Calvin, it is very reasonable to credit him with the wide-spread acceptance of this doctrine. Most denominations hold to some aspect of the doctrine of original sin and total depravity. Many teach that since man is born with a "sinful nature" there is nothing he can do to be saved from sin – God, through the Holy Spirit must do it *for* him. We must examine this topic! Is it true that all humans are born with sin? Is it the

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case that infants, who cannot speak or care for themselves in any way, would be lost eternally if they die in infancy? What does Psalm 51:5 mean?

If the doctrine of *original sin* or *total depravity* were true, the Bible would contradict itself. For example, Ezekiel wrote, "The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son: the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him" (Eze. 18:20). Whatever a man chooses – righteousness or wickedness – he will be rewarded accordingly. The words of Ezekiel align perfectly with what Paul wrote about the judgment day. "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that

he hath done, whether it be good or bad" (2 Cor. 5:10). He also wrote, "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" (Gal. 6:7). There are many

verses in the New Testament that speak about the judgment day and our giving account to God. Every passage speaks of individual accountability. Jesus taught the same thing as recorded in John 5:28-29. Those who have done good will have the resurrection of life and those who have done evil will have the resurrection of damnation. To hold the doctrine **...continued on top of page 3...**



## **FCGN News**

We have recently had several people contact us about the old FCGN website. We no longer have the previous website ([www.fultoncountygospelnews.org](http://www.fultoncountygospelnews.org)). Over the last year we have updated our church website to include all editions of the FCGN. So now you can just visit our congregation's site at [www.mammothspringchurchofchrist.com](http://www.mammothspringchurchofchrist.com) to learn more about our congregation as well as to see the paper. Also, we recently had someone furnish us with 28 editions of the paper that we were missing from the 60s, 70s, and 80s and the disc has been updated! If you are interested, you can purchase a disc for yourself or your congregation's library for \$10. All funds go to the expenses of printing and mailing FCGN.

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## HARD TO BE UNDERSTOOD - EZEKIEL 37 - THE VALLEY OF DRY BONES

*Brock Kendall - Nettleton church of Christ - Jonesboro, AR*

The name Ezekiel means “God strengthens” or “God is Strong.” Perhaps we find the nature of Ezekiel’s work in his name. His mission was one to condemn strongly the sins of the Jews, which were the cause of Jerusalem’s forthcoming destruction. His message and mission called for one who would be strong enough to withstand the criticism and hardship strong preaching provokes from those in sin. Ezekiel had a four-fold mission. He had to dispel any hope among the Israelites that the captivity might be short. He had to prove God’s case against Israel, showing the Israelites why they were in captivity. He had the responsibility to persuade the people to repent of their sins. Lastly, he proclaimed a message of hope (chapters 33-48). The focus of this article is to give an explanation of chapter 37 in its historical and spiritual contexts.

The premillennial advocates interpret this portion of Scripture, which speaks of the return of Israel to Palestine from their Babylonian captivity, as a literal movement of Jews back into Palestine at the beginning of the “thousand-year reign of Christ” at Jerusalem. This theory has no biblical support, and is in fact, a rejection of clear scriptural evidence. Ezekiel had to show Israel that Jerusalem would be destroyed. Moreover, after the fall of Jerusalem he had to help them overcome their despair. The book falls into three parts: 1) We have the prophecies **before** the siege of Jerusalem (1-24). 2) We have the prophecies **during** the siege of Jerusalem (25-32). 3) We have the messages **after** the fall of Jerusalem (33-48). The vision that God gave Ezekiel (valley of dry bones) which represents “the whole house of Israel” (vs. 11), was a vision of their restoration. Indeed, it was a message of good news for a despondent group of people.

The prophet has a vision where he is again “carried out in the spirit of the LORD” to a new location (vs. 1). The careful reader will find that the “hand of the LORD was upon Ezekiel” (vs. 1), which would indicate that he was inspired of God (2 Tim. 3:16, 17). Then, the prophet was brought to a “valley which was full of bones” (vs. 1). These bones represented Israel’s current state while in captivity (vs. 11). Notice that God asks Ezekiel, who is referred to as “Son of man” if these bones can live (vs. 3). Through man’s wisdom it would seem hopeless for the dry bones (Israel) because they are so far gone. But, this great prophet knows that he is talking with the

Almighty, who has the future of Israel in His hands, or any other nation for that matter. Ezekiel doesn’t answer “yes” or “no” but that Jehovah **alone** knows the answer! What a lesson this prophet gives to the “Israel of God” (Gal. 6:16) today on the necessity of humility and reverence that one ought to have when they approach God! God is the Sovereign Ruler of the universe, man is not and shouldn’t act or talk as if he is! In this vision, God tells Ezekiel to prophesy to the bones. This would seem to be a useless task, but doesn’t it also seem like a useless task to preach to a morally decayed society today? Yet today, God commands preachers to “preach the word” and to do so “in season and out of season” (2 Tim. 4:1-4). Even though, sometimes it seems as if no one is listening, true preachers realize that the power is found in God and in the system that He chose and not man (Rom. 1:16, 17; 1 Cor. 1:18-25). The message that God gave Ezekiel was that the bones would live again (Isa. 26:19; Jn. 5:25-29). Since God made Adam from dust (Gen. 2:7), surely He can restore life to dead bones! The restoration of these dry bones will prove to the people that God is LORD! The phrase “they shall know that I am God” is found repeatedly throughout the book of Ezekiel. God wanted His people to know that His purpose for them would be accomplished! Of course, the ultimate purpose which was in the mind of God from eternity was to bring the Christ into the world to die for all men and established His Church (Eph. 3:1-11), which He did to perfection!

Ezekiel did as God commanded him, and an exceedingly great army resulted (vs. 10). Interestingly, the bones came together, bodies were formed, but there was as yet no life. However, life (breath) came from the four winds (all the corners of the world), and they were completely restored to life. Again, the bones represented Israel in captivity. The nation had died and the people had lost hope. Incidentally, this is a parallel to the present age (Eph. 2:1-7). The restoration to life was the restoration to the land of Israel, not some earthly reign of Christ in Jerusalem in the future! Christ will never step foot on the earth again (1 Cor. 15:24; 1 Thes. 4:17).

We are so thankful for the lessons that this great vision gives the child of God today (Rom. 15:4; 1 Cor. 10:11). We are reminded that the LORD is the giver of life. From Genesis one, we learn that God is the Source of life. From Acts 17:25, we learn that He *...continued on bottom of page 3...*

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**...Psalm 51:5...**

of *original sin* or *total depravity* based on a misunderstanding of Psalm 51:5 would contradict many passages that deal specifically with the nature of God's judgment.

If the doctrine of *original sin* or *total depravity* were true, what do the following words of Jesus mean? As His disciples were arguing over who would be the greatest in the kingdom, Jesus used a child as an object lesson for them. He said, "Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 18:3-4). Was Jesus encouraging His disciples to become totally depraved and sinful people in order to enter the kingdom of heaven? The remaining beliefs of Calvinism are entirely dependent upon the first – *total depravity*. Basically it is taught that since man is totally depraved from birth, God must choose who will be saved and who will be lost. Then, those who have been chosen directly by God cannot resist that call, nor can they fall from grace. The problem with these tenets is that Scripture teaches something totally different. Each individual must choose whether or not they will obey God. Acts 13:46 informs us that people can judge themselves unworthy of everlasting life. The Thessalonians turned from idols to serve the living God (1 Thes. 1:9). Once a person turns from sin to God he must keep himself in the love of God (Jude 21). The child of God must deny ungodliness and worldly lusts and live "soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world" (Titus 2:11-12). The word of God does not teach *original sin* or *total depravity*.

So, what does Psalm 51:5 mean? With a knowledge of many other Bible passages we know that it is not teaching that all humans are born with a sinful nature inherited from Adam. Understanding what the Bible teaches about sin will also help in understanding the verse under consideration. Four passages define for us what sin is: (1) a transgression of law (1 Jn. 3:4); (2) failing to do what is right (Jas. 4:17); (3) a violation of one's conscience (Rom. 14:22-23); (4) all unrighteousness (1 Jn. 5:17). An infant cannot do any of these things and individual responsibility for sin is taught throughout Scripture. David was writing out of great sorrow and repentance for the sin(s) he had committed as recorded in 2 Samuel 11-12. He pleaded with God for *mercy*, *blotting out*, *washing*, and *cleansing* from sin (Ps. 51:1-4). He wanted to be *clean* and *whiter than snow* (v. 7). He wrote, "The sacrifices of God are a broken

spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise" (Ps. 51:17). In the middle of all the above statements we find, "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me" (Ps. 51:5). That sentiment is similar to what Paul wrote about himself when he referred to himself as the chief of sinners (1 Tim. 1:15). Paul was an apostle of Christ and had been entrusted with the gospel (1 Tim. 1:1, 11). Christ had enabled him and put him into the ministry (1 Tim. 1:12). Yet, with all of that, he remembered his past of persecution against Christ and the church (1 Tim. 1:13). In the same way, David had been forgiven of his sins of adultery and murder, but he lived with the memory of those terrible events. After being confronted by God's prophet we read, "And David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the Lord. And Nathan said unto David, The Lord also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die" (2 Sam. 12:13). Psalm 51:5 records for us the heart of a man who realized the gravity of his sin and was expressing great regret and repentance toward God. The Holy Spirit, through the pen of David, was revealing the terrible consequences of sin and the feeling of guilt that often remains, even after forgiveness from God.

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**...Ezekiel 37...**

gives life to all humans, and from 1 John 5:11-12 we learn that He gives us spiritual, eternal life in His Son. Thank God for His gifts. Another lesson of immense importance is the truth that God gives reason for hope when hope seems lost. The Jews were disheartened after the final fall of Judah to the Babylonians. Their outlook was bleak (vs. 11). Just when His captive people in a distant land felt like there was no hope for them, the LORD sent the message that He would give them life and cause them to return to their homeland (vs. 12-14). Let us not forget that our God, the Creator of heaven and earth, is "the God of hope" (Rom. 15:13). When matters do not seem to be going our way, when the future looks dim, when we are tempted to throw in the towel, thinking that all is hopeless, let us remember that when God says there is reason to have hope, then there is reason to have hope! God's people should be people of joy, hope, and optimism because our God is the God of hope!

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***FCGN will look a little different beginning in 2019, but you can be sure that the content will remain true to the word of God! We cannot say "THANK YOU" enough to all our readers and supporters!!***

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### Biblical Worship

- Lord's Supper (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 11:23-24)
  - Prayer (Acts 12:5; Phil. 4:6-7)
- Vocal music only (Eph. 5:19; Heb. 13:15)
  - Giving (1 Cor. 16:1-2; 2 Cor. 9:7-8)
  - Preaching (Acts 2:42; 20:7)

### The Churches of Christ

- Bible only (Rom. 1:16; 2 Pet. 1:3)
  - Name (Rom. 16:16)
- Began in Jerusalem (Isa. 2:2-3; Acts 2:1-4)
  - Established by Jesus (Matt. 16:18)
  - Purchased with Jesus' blood (Acts 20:28)
  - Established in the 1st century (Acts 2:47)
- Body of Christ and Christ alone is the Head and Savior (Eph. 1:22-23; 5:23)
- Added to the church today just as in the 1st century (Acts 2:41, 47; 1 Cor. 12:13)

### Salvation

- Belief and baptism (Mk. 16:16)
- Repentance and baptism (Acts 2:37-38)
- Belief, confession, and baptism (Acts 8:37-38)
  - Hear, belief, baptism (Acts 18:8)
  - Faith and baptism (Gal. 3:26-27)
  - Baptism does save us (1 Pet. 3:21)

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