

## Fifth Sunday in Lent

OLD TESTAMENT – Ezekiel 37:1-14

The hand of the LORD was upon 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. <sup>2</sup> He led me back and forth among them, and I saw a great many bones on the floor of the valley, bones that were very dry. <sup>3</sup> He asked me, “Son of man, can these bones live?” I said, “O Sovereign LORD, you alone know.” <sup>4</sup> Then he said to me, “Prophecy to these bones and say to them, ‘Dry bones, hear the word of the LORD!’ <sup>5</sup> This is what the Sovereign LORD says to these bones: I will make breath <sup>a</sup> enter you, and you will come to life. <sup>6</sup> 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.” <sup>7</sup> 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. <sup>8</sup> I looked, and tendons and flesh appeared on them and skin covered them, but there was no breath in them. <sup>9</sup> Then he said to me, “Prophecy to the breath; prophecy, son of man, and say to it, ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe into these slain, that they may live.’” <sup>10</sup> So I prophesied as he commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet—a vast army. <sup>11</sup> Then he said to me: “Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, ‘Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off.’” <sup>12</sup> Therefore prophesy and say to them: ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: O 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. <sup>13</sup> Then you, my people, will know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves and bring you up from them. <sup>14</sup> 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.’”

**37:1–14** After Ezekiel deflated the pride and self-conceit of his hearers (ch 36), he had to overcome their reluctance to accept the Gospel of restoration. Because the heart of the exiles was “deceitful ... and desperately sick” (Jer 17:9), they did not greet the glorious promise of redemption with jubilation but with the doleful lament of despair: “Our hope is lost; we are indeed cut off” (Ezk 37:11). However, the Good Shepherd does not hesitate to seek out also the sheep that have strayed into the desolate country of sullen doubt and bleak hopelessness. He granted Ezekiel a vision that was to convince his hearers that their despair grew out of their refusal to believe in a Creator who “calls into existence the things that do not exist” (Rm 4:17; cf Dt 32:39; Ps 33:9). (TLSB)

**37:1–28** One of Ezekiel’s major visions. Surprisingly no date is given (as in 1:2; 8:1; 40:1), but the event must have occurred sometime after 586 B.C. (CSB)

With the possible exception of the inaugural vision (chapter 1), this is easily the best known chapter of the book—not least because of the well-known African-American spiritual “Dry Bones,” based on the first half of the chapter (37:1–14). The remaining verses (37:15–28) are clearly set off by the word-event formula, “the Word of Yahweh

came to me” (37:15), and the customary address to the prophet as “son of man” (37:16, as in 37:3, 9, 11). It is probably safe to assert that the second half of the chapter is generally as unfamiliar as the first half is familiar. (CC)

It is a bit hard to fit the chapter into neat form-critical categories (thus illustrating the weakness of that approach). “Vision” would probably be the label one would first think of, but the chapter lacks one of the usual nouns for “vision” (הַאֲרָמָה or וִיזוֹן), and the verb הִאֲרָא, “to see,” occurs only in the Qal (in 37:8), not the Hiphil (“to show, cause the prophet to see”), which is commonly used in connection with visions (as in 11:25; 40:4). In favor of interpreting it as a vision, however, is the frequent use of הִנֵּה, traditionally “behold,” characteristic of dream and vision reports. The initial statement of Ezekiel’s seizure by Yahweh’s “hand” would tend to describe more of a prophetic trance or ecstasy. But such labeling is of minimal value in understanding. All in all, “vision” seems the most appropriate term. Greenberg points out that scenes littered with bones are frequent in Mesopotamian curses and/or victory boasts. Yahweh may have chosen to reveal such a scene to Ezekiel because it was familiar to his fellow captives in exile, so its impact upon them would be greater. (CC)

**37:1-14** The faith of the child of God is constantly threatened by two opposite dangers: overconfidence and despair. It was to the second of these dangers that God’s message in Ezekiel 37 is addressed. In the previous chapter God had assured His people that the exiles now in Babylon were not gone forever but that “they will soon come home” (36:8). God’s people were so depressed by their situation, however, that they found it difficult to believe God’s promise. They said: “Our hope is gone; we are cut off” (37:11). To reassure His people God granted Ezekiel a remarkable vision: the vision of the valley of dry bones. (PBC)

Ezekiel, a late contemporary of Jeremiah, spent his entire ministry among the exiles in Babylon between 593 and 571 B.C. His book contains a straightforward Law/Gospel message, chapters 1–24 being Law and 25–48 being Gospel. It is divided into four large chunks of oracles, mostly in chronological order. Chapters 1–24 contain threats and condemnations of the Israelites up until the fall of Jerusalem in 587 B.C. Chapters 25–32 contain prophecies against Israel’s national enemies, which by implication are Gospel for God’s people. Chapters 33–39 are mostly oracles of Israel’s future restoration. Chapters 40–48 are a detailed vision of the restored new Jerusalem. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 2)

Our text (37:1–14) can be divided into four parts. In the first (vv 1–3), Yahweh leads Ezekiel in a vision into a valley filled with very dry bones. The second part (vv 4–8) contains the first of three prophecies which Ezekiel is to deliver at Yahweh’s command. He speaks what the Lord gives him to say, and the bones come together. Tendons, flesh, and skin envelope them, but they are still lifeless bodies. The third part (vv 9–10) contains Ezekiel’s second prophecy, directed to the Spirit (or wind) who enters the bodies and animates them. The final part (vv 11–14) contains God’s explanation of the vision. The dry bones are the Israelites, who had lost hope of ever being released from

exile. God tells Ezekiel to prophesy their future restoration, promising that he will bring the dead out of their graves, put his Spirit in them, and return them to their land. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 2)

In all three of these prophecies one fact stands out clearly: the life-giving Spirit comes through the Word which Ezekiel speaks. Yet it is God who gives life and the Spirit; Ezekiel merely does as he is commanded (vv 7, 10). Life comes through the Spirit and the Spirit comes through the Word of God. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 2)

Ezekiel's vision in the midst of the valley of the dry bones is bracketed by material prophesying the Lord's promise to create a new Israel wherein he will wash his people with clean water, put his Spirit within them, and give them a new heart (ch 36). In that chapter, God also promises to increase his people like a flock so that "the waste cities be filled with flocks of people" (36:38) like the flocks in Jerusalem at the time of sacrifice. On the other side of the pericope is the promise in 37:15–28 that God will have for himself a people with his servant David as their king and shepherd. For God to have such a people will require nothing less than a resurrection from the dead. This is exactly of what Ezekiel is given to be an instrument in our text. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 2)

**37:1-4** Ezekiel says "the hand of the LORD was upon me." This is a formula of revelation used elsewhere in the prophecy (see 1:3; 3:22; 8:1; 33:22; 40:1) to indicate God's action. The vision that Ezekiel is about to see is not of his own pious imagination; it is the work of God's Spirit. In the grip of Yahweh's hand, Ezekiel is set in the midst of a valley strewn with bleached skeletons. In view of this scene, God interrogates his prophet in v 3: "Son of man, can these bones live?" Ezekiel defers an answer to God: "O Lord GOD, you know." As Walther Eichrodt says, "No words are wasted on any human hopes of resuscitation; responsibility for answering the question is shifted onto God's shoulders" (*Ezekiel: A Commentary* [Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1975], 508. Translation © 1970 SCM Press Ltd. Used by permission). Then Ezekiel is told to prophesy over the bones, that is, to speak to them the "word of the LORD" (v 4). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 2)

**37:1-2** The "valley" is the same Hebrew word as the "plain" in 3:22. In the place where Ezekiel had previously seen the majesty of God, he now sees the desolation of the exiles. The dryness of the bones denotes a complete absence of life; they are quite dead. "Having dry bones" is also a Hebrew idiom for feeling despair (v 11). Perhaps the vision drew on Ezekiel's memory of the Israelite dead strewn outside Jerusalem and along the desert road on the way to exile. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 2)

**37:1** *hand of the LORD*. See note on 1:3. (CSB)

Means an open hand which is very powerful and gives direction.

BROUGHT ME – God literally carried Ezekiel spiritually. This and many of the other verbs in this text show the one-sidedness of God’s grace breaking into the lives of an undeserving people.

*Spirit of the LORD.* Used elsewhere in Ezekiel only in 11:5; usually simply “the Spirit,” as in 8:3; 11:1, 24. (CSB)

Hbr *ruach*, also denotes “breath” (vv 5, 6, 8, 9, 10) and “winds” (v 9). (TLSB)

*valley.* The Hebrew for this word is the same as that translated “plain” in 3:22–23; 8:4. Ezekiel now received a message of hope, where he had previously heard God’s word of judgment. (CSB)

Apparently the same “plain” where the Lord appeared to Ezekiel earlier in his ministry (3:22). (TLSB)

*bones.* Verse 11 interprets them as symbolizing Israel’s apparently hopeless condition in exile. (CSB)

Represents the substance of a body. In this text it is about a hopeless Israel.

The bones Ezekiel sees represent the essence of human nature: dead and without hope (V. 11; cf Ps. 6:2; 22:14; 31:10) (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 2)

The verbs in verse 1 (and most of this text) are Hilphil, expressing a causative action. They help emphasize the one-sided action of God’s grace. God – working through His Word, spoken by the prophet – is the sole cause of new life. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 2)

**37:2** LED ME BACK AND FORTH – Means to circle the neighborhood. Ezekiel was shown everything so that he would see the absolute hopelessness of the situation.

God causes Ezekiel to go around and around or back and forth among the bones in order to see that they all were “very dry” – without the least hint or hope of life. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 2)

*a great many bones.* Symbolizing the whole community of exiles. (CSB)

An abundant number in quantity; very plentiful.

*very dry*. Long dead, far beyond the reach of resuscitation (1Ki 17:17–24; 2Ki 4:18–37; but see 2Ki 13:21). (CSB)

Utterly dead. Cf v 11. (TLSB)

Dried or totally withered away. It points to the complete absence of life. Having dry bones is also a Hebrew idiom for feeling despair (V. 11). Perhaps the vision drew on Ezekiel's memory of the Israelite dead strewn outside of Jerusalem and along the desert road on the way to exile. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 1, Part 2)

**37:3** SON OF MAN – This title is 93 times in Ezekiel and always refers to Ezekiel. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 2)

CAN THESE BONES LIVE – Not only live but to be revived. The Lord asks a rhetorical question and the obvious answer is “no.”

Yahweh asks a rhetorical question: “Can these bones live?” The obvious answer is no. Yet Ezekiel expresses faith in the omnipotence of God by answering that only God knows the answer. Perhaps he hoped against all hope that God would somehow bring to life those who were so utterly dead. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 2)

YOU ALONE KNOW - It means to know in many ways and through many different senses. What he is saying is that only God can be aware of what is possible in this situation. He shows a great deal of trust in the Lord.

Cf Jn 21:17; Rv 7:14. (TLSB)

Ezekiel can only plead human ignorance and impotence versus divine omniscience and omnipotence (similarly John in Rev 7:14). Ezekiel's reply tells us very little about how much he (or believing Israel in general) knew at this time about “the resurrection of the body” and “the life everlasting” (Apostles' Creed). But it does provide us with a minimum that must be accepted before we attempt to enlarge the picture. First of all, Ezekiel plainly does not dismiss the very possibility of resurrection out of hand, as many an agnostic would today. That God, the Creator of life, was Lord over both life and death is implicit in the OT from the outset, even when nothing explicit is said about the relation of the two. As early as Num 27:16, we meet the description of Yahweh as “the God of the spirits [תְּרוּחַת] of all flesh [בְּשָׂר].” And Ezekiel would have been aware of the resuscitations of dead people by Elijah (1 Ki 17:17–24) and Elisha (2 Ki 4:18–37), even as the result of a corpse touching Elisha's own bones (2 Ki 13:21). But all those involved recent deaths, of people whose bodies had only begun to decay, and whose bones were far from being “very dry” (Ezek 37:2). So this is something entirely different, and Ezekiel can do no more than refer the question back to God. (CC)

Only the God who made man from the dust of the earth could make something living out of that valley full of bones which represented the whole community of exiles. (PBC)

**37:4-6** Through His Word, God promises miraculous change, despite the description in v 2. The bones, arranged according to their former function and position, are covered with sinews and flesh. (TLSB)

“The prophet is suddenly transformed from being the spokesman of human impotence into the spokesman of divine omnipotence.” Using the citation formula, “thus says the Lord Yahweh” (37:5), he is to prophesy to the bones as though they were a living audience. He proclaims that what is about to be done will be accomplished through the medium of God’s Word, by which Yahweh has the power to fulfill whatever he promises to his people. (CC)

Ezek 37:5 summarizes the restoration to life in general terms, and 37:6 describes the process in greater detail, although the last half of 37:6 simply repeats the assertion of 37:5, adding only that all of it will be done in order that they come to understand the mystery and power of Yahweh—the recognition formula, “then you will know that I am Yahweh.” The ultimate concern is not biological life as much as spiritual, everlasting life through faith and knowledge of God (cf. Jn 6:69; 17:3; Gal 4:9). (CC)

Both Ezek 37:5 and 37:6 emphasize  $\text{רוּח}$ , “spirit,” as the crucial element for life, a theme that will be reiterated in 37:9–10. The LXX highlights the point even more by placing the last two words of 37:5 in a genitive relationship,  $\text{πνεῦμα ζωῆς}$ , “spirit of life” (quoted in Rev 11:11), and expanding the simple  $\text{רוּח}$ , “spirit,” of 37:6 into  $\text{πνεῦμά μου}$ , “my Spirit,” probably under the influence of “my Spirit” in 36:27 and 37:14. (CC)

**37:4-5** The literary skill of Ezekiel is seen in his use of the word *ruach*. It occurs 11 times in this passage and is translated in the NIV by 3 different words: as [God’s] Spirit in vv 1, 14; as breath in vv 5, 6, 8, 9, 10; and as wind in v 9. No single English word can do justice to its variety of meanings. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 2)

The word *ruach* clearly refers to the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity, in vv 1, 14. It appears to mean breath or life in vv 5, 6, 8. The plural clearly means winds in v 9. But there is ambiguity in v 10 and in the singular forms in v 9. Does it mean breath, or does it mean Spirit? We cannot be sure. What is clear is that it is personified and Ezekiel speaks to it, perhaps as a prayer for the Spirit to come and give Israel new life (cf. the hymns “Come, Holy Ghost . . .” LW 157, 158). At any rate, the Spirit (or breath) comes through God’s Word spoken by Ezekiel. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 2)

There is probably an allusion throughout this passage to the original creation of man, which contained references to the Spirit of God (Gen 1:2) and in which God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life (Gen 2:7; though *ruach* does not occur, the verb

*nopach*, “breathe, blow” is the same as in v 9 of our text). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 2)

**37:4** *Prophecy to these bones.* Ezekiel had previously prophesied to inanimate objects (mountains, 6:2; 36:1; forests, 20:47) and now prophesied to lifeless bones and the “breath” (v. 9). (CSB)

Ezekiel is to speak by the inspiration from God.

It is ridiculous to speak to dead bones that cannot possibly hear – unless God’s life-creating Word is spoken, since it can give life to the dead. Compare God’s original creation of man from lifeless earth (Gen. 2:7) (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 2)

HEAR THE WORD OF THE LORD ☐ To hear in a manner that will lead to action on the part of the hearer.

**37:5-6** God’s Word says what it does and does what it says. So God declares his own promissory word to the bones. He will cause breath (*ruach*) to enter them, and they will live. He will clothe the bony frames with sinew and flesh, but it is his breath that will enliven them. The outcome of this restoration is stated at the conclusion of v 6: “you shall know that I am the LORD.” These words echo the promise made already in 36:36 after God declares that the desolate land will become like the Garden of Eden. In other words, this is the promise of the work of the Spirit: a new creation. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 2)

**37:5** BREATH – In this text it is the same word as used for spirit in verse 1. Genesis 2:7 has another word for breath: ☐ Here it means to give a blast/puff of wind; inspiration; or soul.

**37:6** *tendons ... flesh ... skin ... breath.* Lists of four items are common in Ezekiel (see note on 1:5). (CSB)

TENDONS - A sinew holding other parts together.

FLESH - The extension of a person’s body.(QV)

SKIN - The naked skin or hide.

**37:7-10** Ezekiel speaks these words from Yahweh in two scenes. First, his prophetic words are spoken, creating a stirring as disjointed bones are joined together. In his view, the skeletons are knitted together with sinew and covered with skin, but they

remain lifeless corpses: “But there was no breath in them” (v 8). Then a second time Ezekiel is mandated to prophesy, calling on the breath to come from the four winds that they might live. Just as God breathed life into the still, lifeless Adam that he had formed from the earth (Gen 2:7), so now life is breathed into countless cadavers through the prophetic words. God’s Word and Spirit go together, creating life. Also see Ps 33:6. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 2)

**37:7-8** As Ezekiel watches in amazement, the divine words of his prophecy are effective, and the scattered, bleached bones are reconstituted into human bodies. But the reader is brought up short by the final disjunctive clause: “but there was no spirit in them.” All Ezekiel has accomplished so far is to make bodies or corpses; without רוּחַ (“spirit, breath”) in them, they remain lifeless. (CC)

**37:7** WAS COMMANDED - To send a message with a specific message from God who is sending Ezekiel. The exactness of using only God’s words has a parallel in the NT word The exact utterances of Jesus directly from the Scriptures. Jesus provides an excellent example when he answers the devil during his temptations.

Ezekiel carried out his orders and the Lord kept His promise. This ought to be a description of our lives: We carried out the Lord’s orders and the Lord carried out His promises. Knowledge that we are doing the Lord’s will in our lives is what takes away the boredom and drudgery. We are not just working for a paycheck. We are serving God and supporting our families as God expects. We are not just studying. WE are using our minds to the maximum capacity because the Lord has called us to be good managers of our intellect. We are not just taking care of the kids. We are shaping the souls of God’s own children by letting them learn of Jesus from the way we talk and act. And the Lord keeps His promises, just as He did when Ezekiel preached to those dry bones as he was instructed to. (PBC)

*rattling sound.* Probably the sound of the bones coming together, but possibly recalling the sound accompanying God’s presence, as in 3:12–13 (“rushing sound”). (CSB)

**37:8** *but there was no breath.* This visionary re-creation of God’s people recalls the two-step creation of man in Ge 2:7, where man was first formed from the dust and then received the breath of life. (CSB)

Their form and appearance were restored but not yet life, which only God can give. (TLSB)

**37:9-10** The urgency of the one thing needful (cf. Lk 10:42) is expressed by the repetition of Yahweh’s command to prophesy to רוּחַ, “the wind,” which should come from all four “winds” (directions) and by the power of the “Spirit” become the “breath” of life (all of the preceding words in quotes are implied by the same Hebrew noun, רוּחַ. As the context shows, a whole, vast army is to be given life, so Yahweh calls on the

“breath” from the four “winds,” which are elsewhere pictured as his servants (Pss 104:3–4; 148:8; Heb 1:7), to do his bidding. (CC)

The scene is plainly modeled after the creation narrative of Genesis 2. The lump of clay that Yahweh had molded does not become a living being (נִפְּשׁוּ תַיִה) until God “breathed, blew” (the same verb, נָפַח, as used here) the “breath of life” (נְשֵׁמַת חַיִּים, Gen 2:7). Yet this is not a first creation of natural life, but a new creation, as will be made clear by the gift of “my Spirit” in 37:14, hence akin to the rebirth by the Spirit in Jn 3:3–8; Titus 3:5–6. (CC)

By labeling the reassembled corpses as מַרְוּגִים (Qal passive participle of מָרַג, “kill,” 37:9), literally, those who had been “killed, slain,” the perspective changes slightly. The bodies are those of “a very large army” (לֵיָאֵל), as they are called at the end of 37:10 after the “breath” has entered into them and they have stood up. לֵיָאֵל can have other connotations besides “army,” but Ezekiel uses it in that sense in 17:17; 29:18–19; 32:31; 38:4, 15, and it accords with מַרְוּגִים, “slain,” as in battle. (CC)

These had not been buried, however. Ezekiel does not say why, but the curse of being left unburied to be eaten by wild animals appears frequently in treaty oaths of the ancient Near East. The OT is well aware of the practice (cf. Rizpah’s eerie vigil in 2 Samuel 21), and covenant curses mention it (Deut 28:25–26; Jer 34:17–20, the latter with explicit reference to the covenant-making ceremony). The command in Deut 21:22–23 to bury a criminal executed by being impaled (the precursor to crucifixion) also was because of the curse involved (Gal 3:13). (CC)

Nothing indicates that these soldiers were worthy of being restored to life. If we were to ask why they were selected, the explanation must be the general reference to God’s undeserved grace, which informs this entire pericope. (CC)

**37:9** *breath*. See NIV text note on v. 5. (CSB)

*four*. See note on 1:5. (CSB)

The “four winds” in Matthew 24:31 and Revelation 7:1 are associated with all the redeemed, who are gathered from the ends of the earth. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 2)

*slain*. What Ezekiel saw was a battlefield strewn with the bones of the fallen (see v. 10). (CSB)

The passive participle “slain” implies that the people did not simply die; they were killed as a result of sin and unfaithfulness. Similarly, our old Adam must be put to death by being crucified and buried with Christ. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 2)

**37:10** *breath came into them.* Humanly speaking, Israel's hopes for survival appeared dead and buried in the exile. Prospects of national revival were as unlikely as expecting a vast array of skeletons, dried and dismembered, to come to life again. Yet at God's command, spoken by His prophet, death must surrender its victims. (TLSB)

STOOD – Not only to stand but to arise again and take a firm position.

While the bones were in disarray, the resurrected stand as a vast army with strength, order efficiency, and purpose. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 2)

ARMY - This was not only a large band of courageous men, but they were also war worthy.(QV)

The expression can have military or nonmilitary senses. Ezekiel typically uses the military sense. (TLSB)

**37:11-14** These verses are one of the classic sources for the Old Testament teaching of the resurrection, possibly the source of the credal affirmation “And the third day he rose again *according to the Scriptures.*” What was prophesied for Israel was fulfilled by Christ, Israel's representative and Israel reduced to one, so that the church, the new Israel, might share in the promise. Ezekiel uses resurrection imagery to show how Israel will be brought out of exile to new life. The idea of resurrection was known and anticipated by Israel for some time. The idea would have been highly comforting to the Israelites in exile. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 2)

The statement “you will know that I am the Lord” (vv 13, 14) occurs more than 30 times in the book. The people come to know Yahweh as they experience his salvation: they are brought out from their graves, given the Spirit and new life, and returned to the land, the location of the means of grace. This knowledge of the Lord comes from the Holy Spirit working through the prophetic Word. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 2)

God interprets for Ezekiel what has just transpired in this parabolic vision. The bones are the whole house of Israel clean cut off and without hope. Ezekiel's preaching to this dead congregation does what the Lord promises. Graves are opened and the dead live, restored to the land of Israel. Through God's act of opening their graves and bestowing on them the gift of resurrection in the midst of utter hopelessness, the dead will know their God; they will know that he is the Lord. They will know their Lord, for he will put his Spirit within them and locate them in their land. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 2)

**37:11** *Our bones ... cut off.* A sense of utter despair, to which the vision offers hope. (CSB)

Ezekiel explains his symbolism from v 2. (TLSB)

The “are” in “these bones are the whole house of Israel” is a required English insertion in the Hebrew nominal clause, so it should not be pressed. “Represent” or “stand for” would be more accurate. “The whole house of Israel” intimates what will be the subject of the second half of the chapter (37:15–28), the united kingdom, including those whom the Assyrians had exiled about 130 years previously (as has been already affirmed in 36:10 and will be reiterated in 39:25 and 45:6—a consistent prophetic theme in general). The martial picture in 37:9–10 is now abandoned, and the purely visionary form of the previous verses with it. (CC)

Representatively, then, it is the entire eschatological nation that voices the despair quoted in 37:11b. All three expressions of despair are essentially synonymous, although the first is more figurative, connecting with the vision just seen. The remaining verses in the pericope are God’s refutation, divisible into two parts, 37:12–13 and 37:14, each containing promises of divine action. (CC)

The object lesson complete, Yahweh explains its meaning. Repentant Israel recognizes her plight. Her sin caused her exile and Jerusalem’s fall. By herself, she is hopeless. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 2)

This vision of the dry bones might have been the basis for the NT picture of the spiritual status of all people. St. Paul, for example, wrote, “You were dead in your transgressions and sins” (Ephesians 2:1). By nature everyone is spiritually dead, unable to do anything pleasing to God. But in His might and mercy the Lord has made us “alive with Christ” (Ephesians 2:4). This makes it possible for us who were “foreigners and aliens,” exiled from God because of sin, to become “fellow citizens with God’s people” (Ephesians 2:11-13, 19) (PBC)

**37:12** This verse contains a triad of promises, corresponding to the triad of popular laments in 37:11b. Like the laments, they too are introduced by the deictic particle הִנֵּה (untranslated) to arouse the people’s attention. The metaphor now changes drastically to that of a cemetery, something probably not perceived as jarring a transition in Ezekiel’s day as it is for a modern, Western audience. Yahweh first promises to “open” their graves (which theoretically might have been done for other reasons, but compare the NT accounts of Jesus’ resurrection), then promises also to “raise/bring [them] up” from those graves. The verb “I will raise/bring up” is plainly exodus terminology (see the Hiphil of הָעֲלָה also in, e.g., Gen 50:24; Ex 3:17; 32:1; Deut 20:1; Josh 24:17). This leads into the third promise, “I will bring” (וְאֶבְרַחְתִּי), with restoration of Yahweh’s people to their homeland, where even the grave terminology is abandoned. This too is part of the same exodus typology that lies at the heart of most of Ezekiel’s restoration oracles (20:42; 34:13; 36:24; 37:21). (CC)

MY PEOPLE – They are God’s special people and nation.

*graves*. The imagery shifts from a scattering of bones on a battlefield (see note on v. 9) to a cemetery with sealed graves. (CSB)

Vision was to remind the exiles that He who promised to revive their dead nation was the same God who “formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life” (Gn 2:7). Through His prophets, God demonstrated His power to force death to give up its victims (cf 1Ki 17:17–24; 2Ki 4:18–37). (TLSB)

**37:13** KNOW THAT I AM THE LORD – The recognition formula, “then you will know that I am Yahweh” (repeated for emphasis in the next verse), shows that “as ever in the book of Ezekiel, salvation is to be a means to a divine end. The redeeming act of God would bring with it the revelation of his true self.” (CC)

OPEN - To not only open but to open wide or break out.

God calls them “my people.” That is their hope! God will shatter their tombs of sin, resurrecting them from exile. In a new exodus, God will bring them up to the land of Israel, His forgiveness giving new life, direction, and purpose. They will be His people, and He will once again be their God. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 2)

GRAVES - A sepulcher or burying place. Once the stone was rolled in front of it, it was hard to get into or out of. By God freeing them from this captivity was like getting them out of a grave and having new life.

**37:14** I WILL PUT MY SPIRIT – Only the Lord can bring new life to the spiritually dead. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 2)

This verse features  $\text{רוּחַ}$  again, not as “breath” or “wind” or (human) “spirit” but plainly (as in 37:1) the Holy Spirit,  $\text{רוּחַ הַקּוֹדֵשׁ}$ , “my Spirit.” As we noted earlier, the agency of the Spirit was implicit in the word’s earlier translations as “spirit,” “breath,” and “wind,” but could not easily be expressed in a simple translation. The expression inevitably merges with the promises of “my Spirit” in the previous chapter (36:27) and again in 39:29. The promise of “my Spirit” echoes throughout the OT Scriptures and into the NT, for example, Is 42:1, quoted in Mt 12:18; Is 44:3; 59:21; Joel 2:28–29, quoted on Pentecost in Acts 2:17–18; Hag 2:5; Zech 4:6; 6:8. The vista goes beyond mere revivification to the inner transformation of the individual as well, “renewal by the Holy Spirit” ( $\text{\u0391\u03bd\u0391\u039a\u0391\u0399\u039d\u0399\u03a9\u03a3\u0395\u03a9\u03a3 \u03a0\u039d\u0395\u03a5\u039c\u0391\u03a4\u039e\u03a9\u03a3 \u0391\u0393\u0399\u039e\u0399\u03a9\u03a3}$ , Titus 3:5). The Christian will inevitably be reminded that biblical doctrine attributes all this sort of activity to the third person of the Holy Trinity, “the Lord and giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son” (Nicene Creed; cf. 2 Cor 3:17–18), culminating in “the resurrection of the body” and “the life everlasting” (Apostles’ Creed). (CC)

*I will settle you in your own land.*† These words make it clear that the Lord is not speaking here of a general resurrection from the dead but of the national restoration of Israel, apparently dead and buried in the exile. (CSB)

The promise of land, given originally to Abraham, will be fulfilled when the faithful inherit the new heavens and earth. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 2)

The exodus typology has been extended into a new settlement after the pattern of Joshua's conquest of Canaan. Biblical hermeneutics will extend it further into the "land" of the church, ultimately also that of the church triumphant. The OT land promises are fulfilled in Christ, and so Christians enter their "promised land" by being part of the body of Christ, the church, with the promise of entering the new heavens and earth after the resurrection (Mt 25:34). Thus the "very, very large army" (Ezek 37:10) of risen people that will dwell securely in their own land is an OT depiction of the church triumphant, the multitude from every nation, glimpsed by John the Seer (Rev 7:9–17), which, raised bodily after the return of Christ, shall dwell forever in the new heavens and new earth with God in their midst (Revelation 21–22). (CC)

**YOU WILL KNOW** – Three times (vv. 6,13, `4) God states that His Word and work will make His people "know Him," by His gracious acts and through His Holy Spirit. Their certain and lasting hope is to know the Lord. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 2)

**I HAVE DONE** – The pericope closes with redundant, but maximally emphatic asseverations: the recognition formula (in 37:6, 13) is repeated once more, with the reminder that God's Word of promise will certainly be fulfilled (cf. 22:14), and his final signatory formula, "says Yahweh," is added as a still further personal guarantee. (CC)

The revelation of God's power to raise the dead sends beams of light into the future beyond Israel's rescue from death in the Babylonian graveyard. A revived Israel is but the earthly clay that He will use to call into being a Spirit-filled people of all nations, once dead in trespasses but made alive in Christ Jesus (Rm 6:11; Eph 2:1). He who is "the resurrection and the life" will awaken those who sleep in the dust of the earth—"some to everlasting life, and some to ... everlasting contempt" (Jn 11:25; Dn 12:2; cf Jb 19:25; Ps 49:19; 73:24; Is 26:19; Jn 5:25–29). (TLSB)

**37:1–14** In a dream, God carries Ezekiel to a valley filled with dry bones and calls him to prophesy over them. Through Ezekiel's word, the dead receive life. The people receive hope of restoration. God's Word is effective and still has power to give new life and hope. • Almighty God, You alone speak the words of eternal life. Save us, Lord, for we cannot save ourselves. Amen. (TLSB)

**Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus,<sup>2</sup> because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death.<sup>3</sup> For what the law was powerless to do in that it was**

weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man, <sup>4</sup> in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit. <sup>5</sup> Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. <sup>6</sup> The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; <sup>7</sup> the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. <sup>8</sup> Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God. <sup>9</sup> You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ. <sup>10</sup> But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness. <sup>11</sup> And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you.

Chapter 8 begins with “no condemnation...in Christ” and closes with the victorious affirmation of no separation from God's love in Christ. In between is an unparalleled presentation of the Spirit's work (referred to 19 times in vv 1-27) to sanctify and keep us in the faith. There are no imperatives in the chapter, for we are led by the Spirit, not driven by the Law. Luther says: “In chapter 8 (Paul) comforts these fighters, telling them that this flesh does not condemn them. He shows further what the nature of flesh and spirit is, and how the Spirit comes from Christ. Christ has given us His Holy Spirit; He makes us spiritual and subdues the flesh, and assures us that we are still God's children, however hard sin may be raging within us, so long as we follow the Spirit and resist sin to slay it. Since, however, nothing else is so good for the mortifying of the flesh as the cross and suffering, He comforts us in suffering with the support of the Spirit of love, and of the whole creation, namely,, that the Spirit sighs within us and the creation longs with us that we may be rid of the flesh and of sin. So we see that these three chapters (6-8) drive home the one task of faith, which is to slay the old Adam and subdue the flesh.” (AE 35:377-78) (TLSB)

**8:1-2** “Consequently now, nothing [is] condemnation for the ones in Christ Jesus” (see the textual notes on 8:1). Paul explains why this is so in the verses to follow, especially with the verb “condemned” (κατέκρινεν) in 8:3, which is related to the noun “condemnation” (κατάκριμα). The noun and verb indicate a negative judgment against someone and also convey the punishment which goes along with it. God's Son received the punishment (8:3) so that we in Christ are spared both the verdict and the just penalty. Paul's initial statement in 8:1 nicely parallels 8:39, where nothing, that is, absolutely none of the entities encompassed within the sweep of 8:38–39, will be able to separate us from God's love. (CC)

**8:1** In 8:1 Paul identifies those to whom “nothing [is] condemnation” applies; it is “for the ones in Christ Jesus” (τοῖς ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ). The characteristic description of baptized believers as those “in Christ” first appeared in the exposition of Baptism in 6:11 (see the commentary there). The significance of the assertion here is monumental. The dilemma of 7:14–25 is that sin still dwells in me, this is, in my flesh, as “I” (the Christian Paul), during this life, remain sold and still

under sin (7:14, 17–18). The “I,” a baptized believer who utters “thanks to God through Jesus Christ our Lord,” even admits to being a slave to the Law of sin “with my flesh” (7:25). (CC)

The solution, however, is not to try to escape bodily life; neither is it attempting to purify the unreformable “flesh” (σάρξ). Instead, it is defined as being “in Christ Jesus.” In Romans 6 this status is portrayed as the direct result of Baptism: “we were *baptized into Christ Jesus*” (ἐβαπτίσθημεν εἰς Χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν, 6:3). Later in 8:9–11 the indwelling of the Spirit, who is bestowed in Baptism (e.g., Acts 2:38; 1 Cor 12:13; Eph 4:4–5; Titus 3:5–6; compare Rom 6:5 to 8:11) and is further identified as “the Spirit of Christ” (Rom 8:9; cf. Rom 8:11; Acts 16:7), is recognized as a necessary consequence of belonging to Christ, of being “his” (8:9). There Paul not only declares that the Spirit dwells in baptized believers (8:9, 11), but also adds, “Christ is in you” (8:10). In all these verses, the supreme factor is the relationship with Christ which the Holy Spirit establishes through baptismal incorporation into Christ and which the same indwelling Spirit also sustains through faith in “our Lord Jesus Christ” (see 5:1). (CC)

**THEREFORE** – *ara* means “then,” “consequently,” “as a result.” What Paul is about to say is a result of what he just said, namely, that though he is a wretched man whose body is a body of death (7:24), yet he will be delivered through Jesus Christ (7:25), whom God presented as a sacrifice of atonement (3:25). The nun ties the thought back to 3:21, “But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known.” (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 12, Part 2)

**NO** – *ouden* makes the “no” even more emphatic, “not a single condemnation of any kind. The image is that of a criminal who awaits the judge’s just penalty, but then hears instead that the sentence has been commuted. Every charge was silenced at the cross. The Christian’s life is marked by this freedom and this certainty of God’s mercy in Christ. Because of our connection with Christ the Spirit frees us for living in the spirit. As Christians we need not fear because we serve God’s law with our real self, with our renewed mind and will, because we have pleasure in God’s law and, on the other hand, hate and abhor evil. God judges Christians according to the new man, not according to the old man, and does not lay to their account what evil the flesh does. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 12, Part 2)

*condemnation.* The law brings condemnation because it points out, stimulates and condemns sin. But the Christian is no longer “under law” (6:14). (CSB)

God’s Law declares that all people are guilty of sin and deserve to die (cf 7:5, 10-11, 13, 24). Paul now concisely summarizes God’s reverse declaration for those in Christ: “Not guilty!” Luther states: “We fell under God’s wrath and displeasure and were doomed to eternal damnation, just as we had merited and deserved. There was no counsel, help, or comfort until this only and eternal Son of God – in His immeasurable goodness – had compassion upon our misery and wretchedness. He came from heaven to help us (John 1:9). So those tyrants and jailers are all expelled now. In their place has come Jesus Christ, Lord of life, righteousness, every blessing, and salvation. He has delivered us poor, lost people from hell’s jaws, has won us, has made us free (Romans 8:1-2), and has brought us again into the Father’s favor and grace.” (LC II 28-30) (TLSB)

katakrima occurs only in Romans in this form and is used to contrast the consequences of Adam's fall with the effects of Christ's saving work. "Just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men" (5:18). Katakrima brings the sentence of death. Justification brings the gift of life. Those who are in Christ are freed from the sentence of death and released to a new life. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 12, Part 2)

*in Christ Jesus.* United with him, as explained in 6:1–10 (see note on 6:11). (CSB)

This is an expression in Romans for union with Christ and His saving work (3:24; 6:11, 23; 8:39; 15:17; 16:3). Those who believe and are baptized into Him (6:3-4) are now and forever free from the Law's cold verdict and terrifying sentence. (TLSB)

This is a baptismal reference, drawing on Paul's previous words in 6:3,11, "Don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?...In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus." Having been joined to Christ by water and the Word, Jesus' death so sin and to the Law's condemnation counts as our own. He who is our refuge from judgment now gives us to share in his resurrection and to walk in newness of life (6:4). (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 12, Part 2)

**8:2** Rom 8:2 explains why "nothing [is] condemnation" (8:1). "For the Law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus freed you from the Law of sin and death." This is another passage in which the sense of "Law" (νόμος) is contested (see also 3:27; 7:21, 23). Robinson identifies 8:2 as "a typical Pauline transition, with one use of *nomos* sliding into another." What exactly are "the Law of the Spirit of life" (ὁ νόμος τοῦ πνεύματος τῆς ζωῆς) and "the Law of sin and death" (τοῦ νόμου τῆς ἁμαρτίας καὶ τοῦ θανάτου)? English translations traditionally render both occurrences of νόμος with "law" (e.g., ESV, KJV, NASB, RSV, NRSV). However, many commentators exclude any reference to the Law of Moses (the Torah), particularly from the first phrase; instead, they propose that νόμος designates some type of "principle." For example, Matera asserts: "Employing *nomos* in the sense of principle, he refers to the 'law' that is God's own life-giving Spirit." Cranfield also resorts to a metaphorical sense by defining νόμος more specifically as "the Holy Spirit's presence and exercised authority and constraint." Räisänen also does so because "the Torah had been superseded in Christ," who is the "termination of the law" according to his interpretation of 10:4.<sup>16</sup> He contends that 8:2 "support[s] the conclusion that Paul often speaks of the actual abolition of the Torah." But this radical view is difficult to square with 3:31, where Paul states: "Then do we make the Law ineffective through the faith? May it never come to be! But we confirm the validity of the Law" (νόμον ἰσχύνομεν; cf. Mt 5:17–20). (CC)

The notion of an established "principle" certainly conveys what Paul has in mind with his initial use of νόμος in 8:2 (perhaps also in 7:21). But this definition should not be viewed as some nebulous or unattached power. "Law" communicates that νόμος designates a codified and unchanging norm. Furthermore, a metaphorical understanding of νόμος as a "principle" or "authority" is inadequate in regard to the second occurrence in 8:2 (see the commentary on 7:23 and below). Both uses in 8:2 should also be related to Paul's uses of "Law" (νόμος) throughout

Romans and, especially, in the previous chapter. From a practical perspective, it would have been difficult, though not impossible, for those who heard the letter read orally to accurately identify up to five definitions of “Law” (νόμος), “with one use of *nomos* sliding into another.” Together these considerations lead to the conclusion that, as in Romans 7, the Torah should not be dismissed entirely from either phrase in 8:2. As Schreiner states: “Although it is difficult to be certain, the idea that the Mosaic law is intended in both uses of the word νόμος in verse 2 is more probable.” (CC)

For Paul, “Law” (νόμος) consistently maintains a connection with the Pentateuch. Paul then utilizes the context, in this case the qualifying genitives (“of the Spirit of life” and “of sin and death”), in order to direct his focus more specifically. For a significant parallel, see the second textual note and the commentary on 3:21. Paul defines his second use of “Law” (νόμος) in 3:21 more precisely by placing it together with “the Prophets” (ὕπὸ τοῦ νόμου καὶ τῶν προφητῶν), indicating that “Law” (νόμος) refers to the five Books of Moses. Yet there in 3:21–22 Paul is focusing even more specifically on the Gospel promise contained within the Torah which, along with “the Prophets,” testifies to the righteousness of God which is “through faith” (διὰ πίστεως, 3:22). In 3:27 Paul then refers to “the Law of faith,” and in the final verse of Romans 3 he states that through faith “we confirm the validity of the Law” (3:31). These assertions launch Paul into an extensive discussion which corroborates them. The foundational account of Abraham in Romans 4, drawn from Genesis, serves as another positive expression of the evangelical promise which Paul asserts is contained in the narrative of the “Law” (νόμος). See also, for example, Lk 24:27, 44; Jn 1:45; 5:39; 1 Pet 1:10–11. (CC)

In Rom 8:2, then, “the Law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus” refers to the Torah and focuses upon the Christological, Spirit-inspired promises of life enunciated there. These promises are repeated regularly throughout the OT and now stand fulfilled in Christ (3:22, 24–25; 8:3; 10:4), whose Spirit (“the Spirit of Christ,” 8:9) works life (8:5–6, 10–11). In this Gospel sense, this “Law” (νόμος) also designates a codified and unchanging norm. Our Lord’s written words of Spirit and life (Jn 6:63) provide the firm foundation upon which faith rests, as well as the blessed assurance of no condemnation (Rom 8:1; see also *LSB* 728). (CC)

THE LAW – Principle here something like today’s operating system. (TLSB)

nomos here is not the Decalogue but terms of order. Where Jesus is, there is a new order that frees us from the old order of the law. We are released from decay and death into the glory of the children of God. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 12, Part 2)

*the law of the Spirit of life.* The controlling power of the Holy Spirit, who is life-giving. Paul uses the word “law” in several different ways in Romans—to mean, e.g., a controlling power (here); God’s law (2:17–20; 9:31; 10:3–5); the Pentateuch (3:21b); the OT as a whole (3:19); a principle (3:27). (CSB)

pneumatos tas zoas – This calls to mind the phrase in the Nicene Creed that confesses that the Holy Spirit is “the Lord and giver of life.” This he delivers to us through Word and Sacrament. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 12, Part 2)

The Holy Spirit daily cleanses and sweeps out the remaining sins and works to make a person truly pure and holy. (TLSB)

SET ME FREE – Freedom from a binding relationship of ownership or control and authority. (TLSB)

*law of sin and death.* The controlling power of sin, which ultimately produces death. (CSB)

System in which sin brings death (6:16, 21, 23) and the Law condemns to death (7:5, 10–11, 13, 24). (TLSB)

**8:3** The negative side of Paul’s extended analysis of the Law which began in 7:1 is concluded in 8:3. “For the inability of the Law, in that it was weakened through the flesh, God, after sending his own Son in [the] likeness of [the] flesh of sin and as a sin offering, condemned sin in the flesh.” (CC)

But it is important to recall that the Law is holy, righteous, and good (7:12). While inadequate for the redemption of sinners, the Law, in and of itself, is not a negative force or responsible for the failures of sinners. The reason why it is impossible for the Law to effect fulfillment of God’s command and to deliver the life it offers (10:5; 7:10) is because the Law is weakened “through the flesh” (διὰ τῆς σαρκός, 8:3). This phrase assigns the blame to fallen humanity. Unbelievers exist completely within the realm of the flesh (ἐν τῇ σαρκί, 7:5); while believers properly delight in the Law, during their present life they also still remain in the flesh, where sin continues to dwell (7:17–18, 22). Thus it is important to recognize that “the inadequacy of the law lies not in itself but in the conditions in which it has to operate.” (CC)

The “inability” or “*powerlessness*” (ἀδύνατον) of the Law in 8:3 stands in sharp contrast to the Good News of 1:16, which is the “*power* of God” (δύναμις θεοῦ; see the commentary on 1:16). God has dealt decisively with sin, death, and the Law’s inability by “sending his own Son in [the] likeness of [the] flesh of sin and as a sin offering” (τὸν ἑαυτοῦ υἱὸν πέμψας ἐν ὁμοιώματι σαρκὸς ἁμαρτίας καὶ περὶ ἁμαρτίας, 8:3). (CC)

A number of Christological factors in the second half of 8:3 warrant further comment. “In [the] likeness of [the] flesh of sin” (ἐν ὁμοιώματι σαρκὸς ἁμαρτίας) is both profoundly meaningful and potentially misunderstood. The error of Docetism is to suppose that “in [the] likeness” (ἐν ὁμοιώματι) means that Jesus was only like a human, not fully or truly a man. Another error is to ignore “likeness” and twist “flesh of sin” (σαρκὸς ἁμαρτίας) to assert that Christ took on sinful flesh in his incarnation and thus was not sinless. In a compact fashion, Paul effectively avoids both errors. (CC)

That Jesus came “in [the] likeness of [the] flesh of sin” (8:3) is the reality of 2 Cor 5:21: “he [Christ] who knew not sin, he [God] made him sin in behalf of us, so that we might become the righteousness of God in him” (τὸν μὴ γνόντα ἁμαρτίαν ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν ἁμαρτίαν ἐποίησεν, ἵνα ἡμεῖς γενώμεθα δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ ἐν αὐτῷ). Compare the “righteousness of God” also in Rom 1:17; 3:21. The terminology of substitutionary sacrifice, “in behalf of us” (ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν, 2 Cor 5:21), is present verbatim in Rom 5:8 (see the third textual note on 5:6 for ὑπὲρ, which recurs in 5:7–8). It is even more clearly evident in the phrase περὶ ἁμαρτίας in 8:3, literally, “[a sacrifice] concerning sin,” meaning “a sin offering.” The Apology of the Augsburg Confession takes the

phrase in 8:3 as meaning “sin offering” and equates it with the Hebrew term  $\text{זָּשָׂם}$  in Is 53:10, “when he makes himself *an offering for sin*”: (CC)

The word he [Isaiah] uses here (*'asham*) means a victim sacrificed for transgression. In the Old Testament this meant that a victim was to come to reconcile God and make satisfaction for our sins, so that men might know that God does not want our own righteousness but the merits of another (namely, of Christ) to reconcile him to us. Paul interprets the same word as “sin” in Rom. 8:3, “As a sin offering he condemned sin,” that is, through an offering for sin.” (Ap XXIV 23) (CC)

Although the holy and eternal Son of God was not personally guilty of any transgression nor tainted with sin by his incarnation or his own deeds (e.g., Is 53:9; Lk 23:41), the sins of the world were imputed to him, and so he was, in fact, made sin in our behalf (2 Cor 5:21). This explains what is packed into the final phrase of 8:3: God “condemned sin in the flesh.” Both aspects of the noun “condemnation” in 8:1, namely, the verdict of guilt and the execution of the deserved judgment, come out here in the related verb “condemn” ( $\text{κατακρίνω}$ ). The scandal of particularity is that salvation for all was accomplished by God in only one particular way and is available to all only through faith in this particular One: the one-time event of the conviction of the only sinless person “in the flesh” actually condemned and executed sin itself! “What he died, he died to sin *once for all*” ( $\text{ἐφάπαξ}$ , 6:10). (CC)

In so doing, he has redeemed our flesh. While alluding to 1 Corinthians 15, Chrysostom summarizes the implications of Rom 8:3 as follows:

Just because Paul says that Christ came *in the likeness of sinful flesh*, you must not think that his flesh was any different from ours. It was because he called it *sinful* that he added the word *likeness*. For Christ did not have sinful flesh but flesh which, though it was like ours by nature, was sinless. From this it is plain that flesh is not sinful by nature. It was not by taking on a different kind of flesh nor by changing ours into something different that Christ caused it to gain the victory over sin and death. Rather, he allowed the flesh to keep its own nature, giving it the crown of victory and after its resurrection life immortal. (CC)

The Good News is that the Law’s righteous requirement was perfectly fulfilled. Jesus’ own words in Mt 5:17 are most relevant here: “Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill” ( $\text{μὴ νομίσητε ὅτι ἦλθον καταλῦσαι τὸν νόμον ἢ τοὺς προφήτας· οὐκ ἦλθον καταλῦσαι ἀλλὰ πληρῶσαι}$ ). Jesus’ use of “fulfill” ( $\text{πληρῶω}$ ) is even broader than Paul’s (see the third textual note on Rom 8:4). It is a fulfillment and enactment of the righteousness of God testified to by the entire “Law,” or Torah, and “the Prophets” (as in Rom 3:21; cf. Mt 5:20). This necessarily includes both Christ’s active obedience, the action of actively performing “the righteous requirement of the Law” ( $\text{τὸ δικαίωμα τοῦ νόμου}$ , 8:4), as well as his passive obedience, enduring the execution of its righteous pronouncement of condemnation because of our sin (“righteous decree,”  $\text{δικαίωμα}$ , in 1:32; “condemnation,”  $\text{κατάκριμα}$ , in 5:16, 18; cf. 8:1). (CC)

*powerless to do*. The law was not able to overcome sin. It could point out, condemn and even stimulate sin, but it could not remove it. (CSB)

The Law is good (7:12), but it is powerless because the sinful nature cannot keep it. (TLSB)

adunaton tou nomou, the impossible thing of the Law, that which the Law could not do, namely save me from sin or give me the ability to live without sin. The Law is only able to point out the holy will of God, of whose glory all have fallen short (3:23). The law is good, but it is weakened by the flesh, the sinful nature, in whom the ability to do good is not present (7:18). (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 12, Part 2)

*sending His own Son.* Expression implies Christ’s preexistence. (TLSB)

*in the likeness of sinful man.* Christ in his incarnation became truly a man, but, unlike all other men, was sinless. (CSB)

Paul guards against two opposing errors: that Jesus was Himself sinful like other human beings, or that He did not become fully human. Jesus is completely like us (fully human), yet without sin (2Co 5:21; Heb 4:15). (TLSB)

omoiomati sarkos amartias – Jesus subjected himself to all the effects of our sin even though he himself had no sin. He experienced hunger, thirst, pain and weariness. He put himself under the curse and took into his sinless flesh all the sin of the world, that he might put our sin to death once and for all on the cross. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 12, Part 2)

*in sinful man.* See NIV text note; “flesh” may refer either to man’s flesh or to Christ’s. If the latter, it states where God condemned sin, namely, in Christ’s human (but not sinful) nature—the interpretation that seems more consistent with Paul’s teaching. (CSB)

*condemned.* Cf v 1. Sin personified was sentenced to die and executed when Jesus died—in the very realm where it previously reigned: the flesh. (TLSB)

**8:4** But herein lies Paul’s great hinge. He goes on to define us as “the ones who are not walking in accord with the flesh, but in accord with the Spirit” (τοῖς μὴ κατὰ σάρκα περιπατοῦσιν ἀλλὰ κατὰ πνεῦμα, 8:4). The sense of “walk” (περιπατέω) is comparable to Paul’s previous use of the verb in 6:4: “consequently, we were buried with him through this Baptism into [his] death, so that just as Christ was raised from [the] dead through the glory of the Father, thus also *we might walk* [περιπατήσωμεν] in life’s renewal.” There this commentary concludes: (CC)

Paul uses “walk” (περιπατέω) to describe how believers who have “died to sin” (Rom 6:2) are called to live out who we are by virtue of our Baptism in our daily life and conduct (6:4). The basis and exhortation for doing so is the topic of 6:12–23. (CC)

The exhortation to do so similarly follows here in 8:5–13. (CC)

In a manner comparable to 6:11, now 8:4 both completes the previous, largely “indicative” discussion and also moves the discussion forward to speak of the believer’s response. The alternatives in 8:3 are not couched in the imperative (as in 6:11), but as *descriptive* and *defining* characteristics. We are “the ones who are *not walking* in accord with the flesh” (κατὰ σάρκα).

During this temporal existence sin still dwells in us, that is, in our flesh (7:17–18), but we are not defined by it. Since we were baptized into Christ, our will, inner man, and mind resist living “in conformity with” (BDAG, s.v. κατά, B 5) the flesh (7:14–25); in other words, “flesh” (σάρξ) is no longer “the norm which governs” (BDAG, s.v. κατά, B 5 a) us, even while we still live in it. Instead, Paul says, we are now walking in conformity with and governed by the Spirit (πνεῦμα) poured out on us. The details, challenges, and even paradox involved in this contrast are laid out in 8:5–13. (CC)

At this point, however, it is important to grasp both aspects of Paul’s movement in 8:4. “The reference to Christian behavior in this phrase [“the ones who are not walking in accord with the flesh, but in accord with the Spirit”] shows that Paul does not separate the ‘fulfillment’ of the law from the lifestyle of Christians. But, this does not mean that Christian behavior is how the law is fulfilled.” Instead, “the Law of the Spirit of life *in Christ Jesus* freed you” (8:2), by whose sacrifice the Law of sin and death was overcome (8:2–3), by whom the righteous requirement of the Law was fulfilled (8:4), and in whom nothing is condemnation (8:1). So now, let’s walk the walk of the Spirit and not that of the flesh. (CC)

*righteous requirements of the law.* The law still plays a role in the life of a believer—not, however, as a means of salvation but as a moral and ethical guide, obeyed out of love for God and by the power that the Spirit provides. This is the fulfillment of Jer 31:33–34 (a prophecy of the new covenant). (CSB)

Gk *dikaïoma*, Reference to God’s will revealed in the Law. (TLSB)

*fully met.*† Lit. “fulfilled.” God’s aim in sending his Son was that believers might be enabled to follow the intentions of the law. (CSB)

God is the one who fulfills the Law for us. Note the passive voice of the verb. Cf Php 2:13. (TLSB)

Paul is speaking of sanctification, not of justification. It is not fulfilled by us but in us by Christ, who dwells in us by his Word and Spirit. Christ’s work has taken place that we might do that which is right and good. We have been redeemed not for a life of sin, but for a life of holy obedience, not merely for salvation in heaven but for a holy life on earth. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 12, Part 2)

*talk.* Used by Jewish rabbis to denote lifestyle of obedience to the Law (cf Eph 5:2). (TLSB)

*according to the Spirit.* How the law’s righteous requirements can be fully met—by no longer letting the sinful nature hold sway but by yielding to the directing and empowering ministry of the Holy Spirit. (CSB)

Under the Spirit’s power and direction. (TLSB)

**8:5–8** Two mind-sets are described here: that of the sinful nature and that of the Spirit. The former leads to death, the latter to life and peace. The sinful nature is bound up

with death (v. 6), hostility to God (v. 7), insubordination (v. 7) and unacceptability to God (v. 8). (CSB)

**8:5 HAVE THEIR MINDS SET ON WHAT THAT NATURE DESIRES** – A heart ruled by the flesh will think and produce nothing but sinful thoughts and deeds.

Everything that our fallen, self-centered human nature desires and does (cf Gal 5:16–21). (TLSB)

**BUT ACCORDING TO THE SPIRIT** – New mind-set and actions that the Spirit produces (cf Gal 5:22–23). (TLSB)

**8:6 death.** Spiritual death and eternal separation from God. (TLSB)

*life and peace.* Total well-being. These eternal blessings are already ours (cf v 1). (TLSB)

**8:7-8** Unregenerate mind, heart, and will are “entirely evil, perverse, and hostile to God” (FC SD II 17). (TLSB)

**8:7** To be subject to, and thus obey. (TLSB)

**8:8 CANNOT PLEASE GOD** – Those controlled by their sinful nature have no power whatsoever to please God. (TLSB)

**8:9 You.** Plural in Gk. Paul now addresses his readers, the Christians at Rome. (TLSB)

**CONTROLLED NOT BY THE SINFUL NATURE** – The baptized believer’s true and abiding identity is no longer determined by Adam, but by Christ, whose Spirit dwells in him. The flesh no longer wholly dominates his life and dictates his actions. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 12, Part 2)

*Spirit of God ... Spirit of Christ.* As the Nicene Creed confesses, the Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son. (TLSB)

*dwells in you.* Christians as a body (the Church) are the place of God’s abiding presence (1Co 3:16–17; 2Co 6:16–18; Eph 2:21–22). The Third Person of the Trinity, not merely some “force,” resides in them. (TLSB)

*not belong to Him.* Lit, “not His.” A person in whom the Spirit does not dwell is not a Christian. (TLSB)

**8:10 your body is dead because of sin.** Even a Christian’s body is subject to physical death, the consequence of sin. (CSB)

*Christ is in you.* Where the Spirit is, there is Christ. Paul describes the forces at work within a believer. (TLSB)

*you*. Plural, meaning the congregation. (TLSB)

*the body is dead*. From birth, our body travels toward death. It is thus a “body of death” (7:24; cf 6:12; 8:11b). (TLSB)

*your spirit is alive*. Or “the Spirit is life” (see v. 2). On this reading, “body” is understood as in 7:24. (CSB)

May mean the Holy Spirit, through whom the dead are raised (8:11b), or the believer’s renewed spirit. (TLSB)

*because of righteousness*.† Because the spirit of the Christian has been justified, it is not subject to death. The Christian is indwelt by the life-giving Spirit as a result of his justification. (CSB)

**8:11** For the close connection between the resurrection of Christ and that of believers see 1Co 6:14; 15:20, 23; 2Co 4:14; Php 3:21; 1Th 4:14. (CSB)

SPIRIT OF HIM WHO RAISED – Our hope is not only spiritual but also material. The same Spirit who raised Jesus’ flesh and bones from the dead will also raise our mortal bodies and give them new and everlasting life. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 12, Part 2)

God the Father (4:24; Ac 2:32). (TLSB)

IS LIVING IN YOU – This is a reminder to all believers of their Baptism, through which their bodies were made the temple of the Holy Spirit. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 12, Part 2)

*give life to your mortal bodies*. The resurrection of our bodies, guaranteed to believers by the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit—whose presence is evidenced by a Spirit-controlled life (vv. 4–9), which in turn provides assurance that our resurrection is certain even now. (CSB)

According to Paul, the Spirit is a down payment, or guarantee, of our resurrection from the dead (v 23; cf 2Co 1:22; 5:1–5; Eph 1:13–14). (TLSB)

**8:1–11** Because Christ justifies sinners, God’s life-giving Spirit dwells in believers. He frees us from the bondage of sin and death. Those who are preoccupied with satisfying their selfish desires often become angry with God and rebel against Him. God promises release from this deadly cycle and brings life and peace. • Father, by Your Spirit, direct our hearts to Christ, where true joys are found. Amen. (TLSB)

**17** On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. **18** Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem, **19** and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother. **20** When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home. **21** “Lord,” Martha said to Jesus, “if you had been here, my brother would

not have died. <sup>22</sup> But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask.” <sup>23</sup> Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.” <sup>24</sup> Martha answered, “I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.” <sup>25</sup> Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; <sup>26</sup> and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?” <sup>27</sup> “Yes, Lord,” she told him, “I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world.”

**11:17-19** The reference to “four days” is usually explained in terms of one day travel for the messenger, the two-day delay, plus an additional day of travel to get to Bethany. The references to a tomb (*to mnēmeion*) and numerous people coming to console Lazarus’s sisters are indications of significant family status, wealth, and reputation. The proximity of Bethany to Jerusalem, here mentioned as being two miles away, would likely add to the number of well-wishers. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 21, Part 2)

**11:17** *four days*. See note on v. 4. Many Jews believed that the soul remained near the body for three days after death in the hope of returning to it. If this idea was in the minds of these people, they obviously thought all hope was gone—Lazarus was irrevocably dead. (CSB)

Perhaps significant because of the rabbinic belief that the soul hovers over the body for three days and then departs when decomposition sets in. John’s point is that only a genuine miracle could account for the raising of Lazarus. (TLSB)

**11:18** *less than two miles*. Reflects John’s concern for accuracy. (CSB)

**11:19** *to comfort them*. Jewish custom provided for three days of very heavy mourning, then four of heavy mourning, followed by lighter mourning for the remainder of 30 days. It was usual for friends to visit the family to comfort them. (CSB)

Possibly Lazarus and his sisters were of high social standing, thus drawing the attention of many neighbors. (TLSB)

**11:20** *she went out to meet him*. Perhaps because as the elder she was hostess. (CSB)

Mary’s decision to remain at the house is a puzzle. Nearly all interpret it in Mary’s favor—that when Martha heard Jesus had finally come, she kept the news to herself and went out to meet Jesus privately. Given the nature of close sisters in general and their identical complaint to Jesus in particular (vv 21, 32), though, we might wonder if, in fact, Martha did tell Mary, who, in her deep hurt and disappointment, chose to remain seated at the house. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 21, Part 2)

**11:21-22** Martha laments Jesus’ absence when Lazarus was sick but confesses her faith and confidence in him as a great prophet. The phrase “even now” expresses her great faith even in the midst of grief and sorrow. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 15, Part 2)

**11:21-27** Martha concludes her complaint—which isn't so much an accusation as it is a statement of fact—with words of tentative hope now that Jesus has finally come. Jesus speaks to that hope with news of Lazarus's impending resurrection. It's possible Martha misinterprets this as a religious cliché, something she has likely heard quite a bit of the past four days. But her response in v 27 is profound—and quite amazing, given our general impression of her from Lk 10:38–42. We would have expected such words of faith from the sister who chose to sit at Jesus' feet, but from the one preoccupied in the kitchen? (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 21, Part 2)

**11:21** Repeated by Mary in v. 32. Perhaps the sisters had said this to one another often as they awaited Jesus' arrival. (CSB)

**11:22** *whatever you ask*. This comment seems to mean that Martha hoped for an immediate resurrection in spite of the fact that Lazarus's body had already begun to decay. Nothing is too difficult for God to do. (CSB)

A statement of trust and hope that anticipates Lazarus' resurrection to eternal life. Martha did not have the resurrection of Lazarus in mind (cf. v. 39) but affirmed the general truth that God gives Jesus whatever He asks. (TLSB)

**11:23** Jesus interrupts Martha regarding the resurrection and is not being ambiguous, but is gently leading her in the revelation about who He is. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 15, Part 2)

**11:24** Martha's confession of the resurrection could certainly be based on OT teachings pertaining to the resurrection such as Dan. 12:2; Ps. 17:15; Job 19:25-27; and perhaps even the vision of Ezekiel. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 15, Part 2)

Taught by the Pharisees and others but denied by the Sadducees (cf Mt 22:23–33). (TLSB)

**11:25-26** Jesus directs Martha's attention away from Lazarus and the ultimate resurrection to himself and what he was about to do, indeed to what he is. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 15, Part 2)

**11:25** *I am*. See note on 6:35 – (In the Greek the words are solemnly emphatic and echo Ex 3:14.) (CSB)

*life*. See note on 1:4 – (One of the great concepts of this Gospel. The term is found 36 times in John, while no other NT book uses it more than 17 times. Life is Christ's gift (10:28), and he, in fact, is "the life" (14:6). Jesus was saying more than that he gives resurrection and life. In some way these are identified with him, and his nature is such that final death is impossible for him. He is life (cf. 14:6; Ac 3:15; Heb 7:16). (CSB)

Everlasting life can be found in no one else but Jesus. (TLSB)

*He who believes ... will live.* See note on 1:7. Jesus not only is life but conveys life to the believer so that death will never triumph over him (cf. 1Co 15:54–57). (CSB)

THOUGH HE DIE – Even those who die physically in faith will rise again to everlasting life. Physical death is no obstacle to the resurrection. Cf 1 Cor. 15. Luther says, “The cemetery or burial ground does not indicate a heap of the dead, but a field full of kernels, known as God’s kernels, which will verdantly blossom forth again and grow more beautifully than can be imagined” (AE 28:178). (TLSB)

**11:26 NEVER** – The Greek grammar denies even the possibility of something happening. (TLSB)

DO YOU BELIEVE THIS – Jesus’ question probes the heart of every suffering human being. Blessed are those who can answer as Martha did. (PBC)

**11:27** *I believe.* Martha is often remembered for her shortcoming recorded in Lk 10:40–41. But she was a woman of faith, as this magnificent declaration shows. (CSB)

Reflects Martha’s conviction as that of Peter in Jn 6:68–69 and of the church, which believes that because Jesus is the Christ, the Anointed One who was to come from God. Through him all believers will emerge victorious from death. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 15, Part 2)

**11:17–27** Jesus assures Martha that all who believe in Him, though they die physically, will live forever. Death is the consequence of sin (Gn 2:17; Rm 5:12; 6:23) and eventually takes everyone. No human being can overcome it. Comfort one another in the hope that even in the face of death, believers in Jesus Christ possess the sure promise of their own resurrection to everlasting life. • In the hour of our death, comfort us, O Lord, with the bright hope of life forever with You. Amen. (TLSB)

<sup>38</sup> **Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance.** <sup>39</sup> **“Take away the stone,”** he said. **“But, Lord,”** said Martha, the sister of the dead man, **“by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days.”** <sup>40</sup> Then Jesus said, **“Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?”** <sup>41</sup> So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, **“Father, I thank you that you have heard me. <sup>42</sup> I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me.”** <sup>43</sup> When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, **“Lazarus, come out!”** <sup>44</sup> The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, **“Take off the grave clothes and let him go.”**

**11:38-44** Martha seems to misunderstand Jesus’ call to open the tomb, warning him of the smell, as though he only wishes to view the corpse. His audible prayer is to

reinforce the source of the miracle for those observing. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 21, Part 2)

**11:38** CAVE – Burial chamber sealed by a stone. (TLSB)

**11:39** *four days*. See notes on vv. 4, 17. (CSB)

The thought of raising a person after four days, when decay had set in, seemed impossible, even to Martha, who confessed that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. (TLSB)

Martha, failing to apply the lesson Jesus taught her earlier (vv 23-26) objected. “He already stinks,” she warned. (PBC)

**11:40** *glory*. See note on v. 4. (CSB)

Jesus guides the listeners back to the promise of his power and the fullness of his glory. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 15, Part 2)

**11:41** LOOKED UP – This was the posture of prayer (cf. Mk. 6:41; Lk.18:13; Acts 7:55). (TLSB)

Jesus prays, making clear that this act is a work given him by the Father who sent him. Effected through the Word of Christ, this miracle, as well as his own resurrection, most vividly portrays the glory of his Godhead. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 15, Part 2)

**11:42** Jesus’ prayed publicly so the crowd would know and believe that He was dependent on and obedient to His Father, who had sent Him. (TLSB)

Jesus seeks to turn the faith of the bystanders by praying to his heavenly Father, “I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me.” (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 15, Part 2)

**11:43** The command for Lazarus to “Come out” parallels John 5:28-29, where also at the sound of his voice “all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out.” (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 15, Part 2)

**11:44** *strips of linen*. Narrow strips, like bandages. Sometimes a shroud was used (see note on 19:40). (CSB)

Burial customs included wrapping a corpse with strips of cloth, effectively binding it. (TLSB)

*a cloth*. A separate item. (CSB)

*them.* People standing near Lazarus. (TLSB)

TAKE OFF THE GRAVE CLOTHES – Reflects Jesus’ sensitivity to personal needs (cf. Mk. 5:43). (TLSB)

Many English translations minimize the literal translation of “loosing” Lazarus from his burial cloths, which can be so vividly associated with the “loosing” of sin talked about in Mt 18:18. Literally, Lazarus was to be set free from that which bound him as we are also set free from the sin that binds us. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 15, Part 2)

**11:38–44** By raising Lazarus, Jesus reveals God’s glory and that He is truly the resurrection and the life. Apart from faith in Christ, the fear of death brings hopelessness and despair. Believers, however, can eagerly look forward to the day when Jesus will call them from their graves to live with Him forever (cf 5:28–29). • O God of life, when death takes one I love, may the promise of our resurrection turn my sorrow into joy. Amen. (TLSB)

### *The Plot to Kill Jesus*

**45** Therefore many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary, and had seen what Jesus did, put their faith in him. **46** But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done. **47** Then the chief priests and the Pharisees called a meeting of the Sanhedrin. “What are we accomplishing?” they asked. “Here is this man performing many miraculous signs. **48** If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and then the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation.” **49** Then one of them, named Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, spoke up, “You know nothing at all! **50** You do not realize that it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish.” **51** He did not say this on his own, but as high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the Jewish nation, **52** and not only for that nation but also for the scattered children of God, to bring them together and make them one. **53** So from that day on they plotted to take his life.

**11:45-50** The unbelief and animosity of the Council, in view of a tremendous miracle—that, by the way, they do not deny occurred—is nothing less than startling. Caiaphas, ever the pragmatist, settles on a course that will maintain the status quo. And how revealing is it that God has no place in their discussion! (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 21, Part 2)

**11:45** *many of the Jews ... put their faith in him.* Perhaps some who had been opposed to Jesus now came to believe (see note on 1:19; cf. 20:31). (CSB)

The effect of this miracle was that those present saw what Jesus did and believed. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 15, Part 2)

**11:46** *Pharisees.* See notes on Mt 3:7; Mk 2:16; Lk 5:17. (CSB)

Some Jews apparently didn't know what to think. They reported the event to the Pharisees, most of whom were Jesus' enemies. (PBC)

**11:47** *the chief priests and the Pharisees.* In all four Gospels the Pharisees appear as Jesus' principal opponents throughout his public ministry. But they lacked political power, and it is the chief priests who were prominent in the events that led to Jesus' crucifixion. Here both groups are associated in a meeting of the Sanhedrin (see note on Mk 14:55). They did not deny the reality of the miraculous signs (see note on 2:11), but they did not understand their meaning, for they failed to believe. (CSB)

**MEETING OF THE SANHEDRIN** – The Sanhedrin was made up of 71 members, with the requirement that each be at least 30 years old, of good reputation, and know the law. They were the supreme council of the Jewish people. They are called into session (perhaps a regular session, but with a special agenda). Their concern is how to deal with the “Jesus problem.” Note how they disdain using his name; they refer to him as *houtos ho anthrōpos* “this fellow.” (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 9, Part 2)

**WHAT ARE WE ACCOMPLISHING** – Their question (*poioumen* —present tense) “asks what really is being done and thus implies that actually nothing at all is being done about Jesus. (R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of John's Gospel* [Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1961], 822). Jesus has become a problem for their purposes and they are spinning their wheels trying to change the situation (Jn 12:19; Acts 4:16–17; 5:25). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 9, Part 2)

**HERE IS THIS MAN** – *outos o anthropos* means this fellow. They show a real disdain for his name. The Jewish authorities never want to use Jesus' name. One can trace that through all four Gospels. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 9, Part 2)

**PERFORMING MANY MIRACULOUS SIGNS** – This was, especially evident as Jesus was performing many signs and miracles. John uses *semeion* (sign) 17 times to refer especially to the miracles of Christ. Especially notable was his most recent and dynamic miracle, the raising of Lazarus, who had been dead four days. This happened almost in their own backyard, and the area was buzzing with talk of Jesus. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 9, Part 2)

Note the tragic mistake of the Jewish cabinet. “These leaders openly admit the most glorious Messianic deeds and yet do not dream of believing” (Lenski, *The Interpretation of John's Gospel*, 823). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 9, Part 2)

**11:48** **IF WE LET HIM GO ON** – “If we let him go on like this” implies that they think they are in charge of circumstances and simultaneously demonstrates how desperate they really are. “We can't maintain the status quo!” Note how they project into the future—“will believe” and “will come and take away.” *topon*, translated “place,” could refer to their country as a whole, the capital city, or the Temple. Lenski believes it best refers to the ruling position of the Sanhedrin (Lenski, 824). They were worried about self-preservation. If they were to continue to be in charge, they needed a nation to rule.

Note the word is *ethnos*, not *laos* used for a group of people. If Jesus gathered too many followers, a riot or rebellion might ensue, the Romans would crack down, and the Sanhedrin would be out of business! This could not happen! (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 9, Part 2)

*place*. Probably the temple (see NIV text note and Ac 6:13–14; 21:28), though sometimes the Jews used the expression to denote Jerusalem. (CSB)

Romans reacted harshly against rebellions, riots, and disorder in general. Jewish leaders feared that if Jesus stirred up the mob, the Romans would destroy the temple (“our place”) and the Jewish nation. (TLSB)

**11:49 Caiaphas**. High priest c. A.D. 18–36. He was the son-in-law of Annas (18:13), who had been deposed from the high priesthood by the Romans in A.D. 15. (CSB)

High priests were ordinarily chosen for life, but that was often not the case under Roman rule. (TLSB)

*high priest that year*. Means “high priest at that time.” The high priesthood was not an annual office but one supposed to be held for life. (CSB)

*You know nothing at all!* A remark typical of Sadducean rudeness (Caiaphas, as high priest, was a Sadducee). Josephus says that Sadducees “in their intercourse with their peers are as rude as to aliens.” For Sadducees see notes on Mt 2:4; 3:7; Mk 12:18; Lk 20:27; Ac 4:1. (CSB)

The question is still before them: How can they control things to prevent this from happening? The answer is to come from their highest religious leader, the high priest Caiaphas (18:14). Caiaphas’ regular name was Joseph. He served as high priest from A.D. 18 to 36. “That year” underscores the fact that during this tumultuous, decisive year it was Caiaphas who occupied the chair of high priest. It does not restrict his service to this single year. Unfortunately, the high priests were often corrupt and did not measure up to the standard of service that the Lord intended (Hos 5:1; Micah 3:4; Mt 27:20, 41). Caiaphas belittles their understanding and ability to produce a creative and helpful solution. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 9, Part 2)

**11:50 KNOW NOTHING** - Caiaphas chides them again for not considering the perfect and obvious solution. Here it is: “Make a small sacrifice of one man’s life (Jesus) in order to gain the greater good of preventing the whole nation from perishing.” That means we can get back to our business as usual. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 9, Part 2)

*better*. Caiaphas was concerned with political expediency, not with guilt and innocence. He believed that one man, no matter how innocent, should perish rather than that the nation be put in jeopardy. Ironically, the Jews went ahead with their execution of Jesus, and in A.D. 70 the nation still perished. (CSB)

THAT ONE MAN DIE FOR THE PEOPLE – *Huper* here has the connotation of substitution, “instead of.” What a noble concept Caiaphas had; eliminate the one who interferes with us and spare the rest of the nation! There was not unanimous consent to this idea. At least Joseph of Arimathea did not agree (Lk 23:51), and Nicodemus’ agreement is also doubtful. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 9, Part 2)

His concern was political, but God made his words prophetic. He wanted to preserve a nation on earth, which would be destroyed 40 years later anyway. Jesus, Caiaphas’ intended victim, came to establish a nation that can never be destroyed – namely, the nation of God’s children found everywhere in all times. (PBC)

**11:51-53** It seems the Holy Spirit made use of Caiaphas’s pragmatism to turn an apostate high priest into an unwilling prophet—not unlike Balaam (Numbers 22–24). Three things are of special note here: First, Jesus’ upcoming death is salvific, but for more than just the nation that Caiaphas has in mind. It will include all God’s children (see Jn 1:12–13). Second, his substitutionary death will gather, not scatter (see Jn 10:16; 12:32–33). And last, the active planning of Jesus’ execution, now set in motion by the Council, is what Jesus had in view all along. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 21, Part 2)

**11:51** *as high priest.* Caiaphas was not a private citizen but was God’s high priest, and God overruled in what he said. (CSB)

*prophesied.* His words were true in a way he could not imagine. Prophecy in Scripture is the impartation of divinely revealed truth. In reality Caiaphas’s words meant that Jesus’ death would be for the nation, not by way of removing political trouble, but by taking away the sins of those who believed in him. (CSB)

Caiaphas is compelled by God to utter more than he intends or knows. Like Balaam of old, he must speak what God puts in his mouth (Num 23:12). Despite abuses of the priestly office, the Lord abided with the ministry He established. (Mt. 23:2) (TLSB)

John gives us the real reason Caiaphas spoke that way. How easily we forget that man proposes, but God disposes! The very words that Caiaphas uttered, intending to save his own hide and the power of his Sanhedrin friends, were given by God to him to utter! This is dramatic irony at its best, a character uttering words truer than ever imagined! God has sometimes used rather unusual means as his media messengers. Consider Balaam (Numbers 24). The Lord honored the high priestly office by allowing Caiaphas to prophesy thus, even though Caiaphas had no idea how powerfully true his words were in God’s plan of salvation. Lenski calls this an unconscious, “peculiar case of verbal inspiration” (Lenski, 829). This is pure Gospel! There will be a substitution. Jesus will be the one life substituted for the benefit of the whole Jewish nation, not by avoiding the threat of Roman retaliation for some potential future uprising, but by removing the devastating destruction of sin’s results. The imperfect high priest Caiaphas thus

unwittingly prophesied about the perfect High Priest, our Lord Jesus Christ (Heb 7:26–27). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 9, Part 2)

**11:52** *for the scattered children of God.* Jesus' death would have effects far beyond the nation (cf. 1:29; 3:16; 4:42; 10:16; etc.). (CSB)

All believers in Jesus Christ, born anew by the Holy Spirit through water and the Word (cf 1:12-13; 3:1-6). St Bernard of Clairvaux states, “We see flourish again under our eyes the wood whereon the Lord of Glory hung, who died not for His own nation only...He, yes, He Himself draws you, who loves you as His own flesh, as the most precious fruit of His cross, as the most worthy recompense of the blood He shed” (SLSB, p. 165). (TLSB)

**MAKE THEM ONE** – God’s plan brings blessings beyond the border of the “nation.” God has designed that salvation and life with him are gifts given to all who will receive him by faith, wherever they may live in the world. They may be scattered around the face of the globe, but rest assured the Lord knows those who are his. More important than being subjects of Rome or under the rule of the Sanhedrin is God’s gracious outreach to make them “children of God” (Rom 8:16; Jn 10:16; Acts 18:10; 1 Jn 3:1). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 9, Part 2)

Interestingly enough, when God reaches down with his powerful love to reunite sinners with himself, a growing horizontal kinship also ensues. This is not a partnership along lines of race, ethnicity, or politics. It results from the Gospel bringing and binding us together (Rom 12:5; 1 Cor 10:17; 12:12–13; Gal 3:28), making us “one holy Christian church.” (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 9, Part 2)

**11:53** **THEY PLOTTED TO TAKE HIS LIFE** – The decision was made. All that was left to do was to devise the mechanics of executing the decision, executing Jesus. They plotted—formed a conspiracy (Mt 12:14; 26:4; 27:1; Luke 6:11). They forged ahead with their plan, deluded into thinking they have things under their control. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 9, Part 2)