

Just Old Dry Bones

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When most people hear the word 'prophet,' they think about somebody who predicts the future. But in the Bible, it means more than that. A prophet gives messages from God to His people. Sometimes those messages might tell the future, but they are always given to help His people at that moment in their lives—perhaps to warn them of punishment for wrongdoing, or encourage them to stay true to what they believe in hard times.

And sometimes those prophecies come in the form of stories. Jesus Himself was a prophet, and He loved teaching God's truth with stories.

One prophet from the Old Testament was Ezekiel, who was a prophet while the people of Israel were exiles in Babylon, and God gave him a large number of prophecies. One of his most famous prophecies concerns the end of Israel's 70-year exile to Babylon, and many teachers believe it also predicted the rebirth of Israel as a nation in 1948, nearly 1900 years after they were sent into a worldwide exile.

But this prophecy is also a story, a colorful description of how God brings new life to all of us. That story is told in Ezekiel 37:1-14.

One day, in Babylon, the Lord spoke to Ezekiel—
no, He did more than speak.

He came to Ezekiel and carried him away,
away to a huge valley in the middle of nowhere,
a dry sandy valley where nothing lived.
The whole valley will filled with nothing but bones,
old dry bones,
and the Lord set Ezekiel down in the middle of them.
There was nothing but bones,
old dry bones,
as far as Ezekiel could see.

And then the Lord asked him,
"Ezekiel, can these old dry bones live again?"

"No one knows but You, Lord," Ezekiel said.

"Then speak to them, Ezekiel!
Speak to these old dry bones and tell them this:

"I am the Lord your God, and this is what I say:
Now you are dead, but I will make you live again!
I will cover you with muscles,
I will clothe you with skin
I will put breath into you AND YOU WILL LIVE!
Then you will know that I am the Lord!"

So that is what Ezekiel did.

The prophet looked around at all those old dry bones,
old dry bones that had lain in the valley for so long,
and spoke the words as the Lord had commanded him to do.

At first nothing happened...

but then, those old dry bones began to rattle.
It was just a few at first, the old dry bones lying closest to him,
but the rattling began to spread,
filling the valley until the noise was deafening.

They rose from the valley floor,
rising and swirling and joining together,
foot to leg, leg to hip, hip to spine, spine to head,
bone to bone until the valley was filled
with a multitude of skeletons lying on the sand.

Then layers of muscle wrapped themselves around the skeletons
and skin flowed over the muscle
until the valley was filled with an army,
all lying shoulder to shoulder on the sand...

But they were just lifeless bodies.

“And now, Ezekiel,” the Lord said,
“Command the winds to breathe life into them.”

So Ezekiel did as he was told.

And the winds began to blow across the valley,
at first, just gentle breezes,
then they grew stronger and stronger
until the sand on the valley floor swirled around the bodies...

and suddenly they all came to life and stood up together,
thousands and thousands of healthy people.
It was as if an actual army had just appeared from the sand!

Then the Lord said, “Ezekiel,
these bones are the people of Israel.
They are all saying, ‘We are nothing but old dry bones
and we have no hope of surviving!’
But I have a message for you to give My people.

Tell them that the Lord their God makes them this promise:
Tell them that, although they believe their hope is dead,
I will open the grave that holds them in exile
and cause them to live again.

And when I do,
I will bring them back to the land of Israel
and then they will know that I am their God.
I will put My Spirit in them,
and they will return to the land I gave them.
Then they will know without question
that I have done everything I promised I would.
I, the Lord, have spoken.”

And when 70 years had passed,
the Lord did just as He promised.
He brought the exiles out of Babylon
and back to the land of Israel.
Later, in the first century,
the Romans destroyed their nation again,
and again the Israelites were exiled;
this time they were sent all over the world.
But in 1948, the Lord brought them back to Israel again.

It appears that our God is in the business
of giving new life to those whose hope has died.
It is one of the great truths that we hold so dear,
and it may be the greatest truth that Jesus Himself taught us.

It seems that
old dry bones
are no problem for our God.