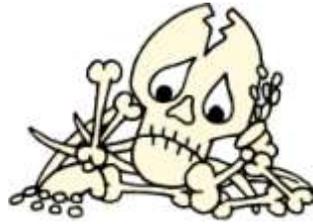


Ezekiel and the Dry Bones



I think I might like to have a pet chicken. If I dig a hole and bury a chicken bone from last night's dinner, do you think I could *grow* a chicken? What if I put the bone in a cage with some chicken feed? If I wait long enough, will the chicken grow back around the old chicken bone? No, of course not. But let me tell you a story from the Bible about some bones that did come to life.

A very long time ago, a man named Ezekiel was sad. He and many other people who worshipped the one true God were taken away from their homes by soldiers and carried away to a place called Babylon, far from the temple in Israel where they worshipped God. God saw how sad His people were and didn't want them to lose hope, so He sent a vision to Ezekiel.

Now a vision is something like a dream, because it isn't *really* happening. It's also different than a dream, because Ezekiel saw it when he was awake. It was a picture God used to show Ezekiel what He was going to do for Israel. I think God has something to teach us from this vision, too.

In his vision, God set Ezekiel in the middle of a valley full of bones. Everywhere he looked, there were bones scattered on the ground. That would have been spooky enough, but as he looked carefully, Ezekiel saw that these weren't chicken bones or the bones of wild animals—they were people bones!

On the ground were skulls and anklebones, little rounded bones like the ones that make up your spine and long bones like the ones in your legs. There were little toe bones and stubby finger bones and curved rib bones and the tiny bones that belong inside the ear. It looked like the bones had been in the valley a long time, because they were very dry. God asked, "Ezekiel, can these bones live?"

What would you say?

Ezekiel wasn't sure. He answered God, "You are the only one who knows, Lord." Wasn't that a good answer? Then God told Ezekiel, "Tell these dry bones to listen to the word of the Lord." Say, "I am going to bring you

back to life." Ezekiel obeyed God and said to the bones, "Hear the word of the Lord!" Then he watched carefully.

Ezekiel heard a little rustle, and then a louder rattle, and then so much clacking and rattling he could barely hear himself think! As he watched, bones began sorting themselves out and attaching themselves to each other—finger bones to hand bones, hand bones to wrist bones, wrist bones to arm bones and on and on.

Finally the skulls were plopped on top of the skeletons and they were finished—but wait! As Ezekiel watched, they grew muscles, and then they grew skin. They looked just like living people—a whole army of people made from the dry bones.

God told Ezekiel to speak again, and the army began to breathe and move. Now they *were* living people.

Remember, I told you that this story was a vision. There wasn't a *real* valley full of bones that came to life. But it was a real picture of how God would bring Ezekiel's people back to their home—He would make the nation that seemed dead alive again. It is also picture of something even more exciting; something that God can do for you and me.

God says that because of sin—the bad things that we do that displease God—our souls can't understand God and can't love Him. (Your soul is the part of you that thinks and has feelings and lives forever.) Our souls are dead toward God. Can they come alive? Yes! That's one thing we learned from Ezekiel's vision—God can make dead things come alive. And just like the bones came to life when they heard the words of the Lord, our souls can come alive toward God when we hear what He has to say in His Word, the Bible.

In the Bible, God tells us who He is—that He is the creator of the World and that He sent his Son so that people like us can be forgiven. He tells us about Jesus, God's Son who lived a perfect life and then died on the cross. Jesus came back to life again to show everyone that God accepted His death as punishment for the sins of His people. The Bible teaches us how our souls can be made alive and become part of an army of people who will live forever with God. Hear the word of the Lord!

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