

*Ezekiel's Vision of the Dry Bones

You know that the Assyrian Empire conquered the northern kingdom of Israel. At that time, the prophet Isaiah said that the southern kingdom of Judah would also be captured someday. About 120 years later, the Babylonian Empire did conquer Judah and its main city, Jerusalem. Many who lived in the city were taken as captives to Babylonia. One of these captives was the prophet Ezekiel.

What could Ezekiel do for his people, so far from home, so lonely in a strange land, without a place of worship? Ezekiel had a very important job to do: to give God's word to the people in exile (which means being away from home when you do not choose to be.) Ezekiel was given many visions by God. Through these visions, he was able to tell the people what God wanted them to know.

Not everything that Ezekiel told the people was good news. He had to remind them of the many times they had disobeyed God's laws. He made them remember that they had often turned their backs on God, or forgotten His teachings. He reminded them of the wonderful things God had done for them—things for which they failed to thank Him.

God told Ezekiel to say this to the people:

On that day I swore to them that I would bring them out of the land of Egypt into a land that I had searched out for them, a land flowing with milk and honey, the most glorious of all lands. And I said to them, "Cast away the ugly things your eyes feast on, every one of you, and do not make yourselves unclean with the idols of Egypt; I am the Lord your God.

But they rebelled against me and would not listen to me; they did not every man cast away the ugly things their eyes feasted on, nor did they forsake the idols of Egypt. (Ezekiel 20: 6-8)

Ezekiel had other hard things to say to the people. Some of them hoped to be able to return to Jerusalem soon. He knew this could not happen, and told them so. But like the other prophets, Ezekiel had God's message of love and hope for the people. He told them that one day the scattered people of Israel would be gathered from all the places where they were now. Then, once again, they would be made into a great nation.

One of Ezekiel's most famous visions is about a valley of dry bones that will be raised to life. In our churches we read Ezekiel's description of this vision during Holy Week. It reminds us that Jesus died and rose again from the dead, bringing us all new life. Ezekiel tells us about the vision:

the Lord brought him into a valley filled with very dry bones. God asked him, "Son of Man, can these bones live?" Ezekiel answered, "O Lord God, you know." The Lord told Ezekiel to "prophesy", meaning to tell what the Lord planned to do. Ezekiel was given power by God to say that the dry bones would live again. And as Ezekiel watched, the bones came together with muscles and skin. Then breath came into them, and they stood up as living people.

God commanded Ezekiel to tell the people of Israel that they were like the dry bones. They were dead and dried up. Their strength and energy were gone.

But God made a promise to them. He told Ezekiel to say to them, "I will put my Spirit in you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land; then you shall know that I, the Lord, have spoken, and I have done it" (Ezekiel 37: 14.)

Ezekiel was glad to give this good news to the people. Now, even though they were in exile, they could have hope for the future. They could be sure that God would be with them always. He was there, even if they were far from home.