

# Jeremiah against Everyone

JEREMIAH 1

**B**eing one of God's prophets was hard work.


It may sound easy—all you had to do was tell people how much God loves them.

That was definitely one of the messages the prophets gave, but the people needed to hear more than that. Many of the Israelites were good to go on God's love. What they weren't very good at was loving God back.

Time and time again, the Israelites decided to do things their own way. Actually, that's only half right. Time and time again, the Israelites decided to do things *everyone else's* way. They were supposed to be a holy nation, a royal priesthood, a people set apart. But instead of living like special people following God's way, they wanted to be normal people doing things the world's way. God raised up the prophets to rebuke his people, warn them of judgment, and call them to walk according to God's commands.

Now that's a hard job!





And no prophet had a harder job than Jeremiah. When Jeremiah was a young man, the Lord spoke to him. “I knew you even before you were a baby in your mom’s belly,” the Lord said. “I have appointed you to be my messenger.” When Jeremiah said he couldn’t do the job because he was too young, the Lord replied, “Do not be afraid. I will be with you and put my words in your mouth.”

Jeremiah would need the Lord to be with him, because the words he gave Jeremiah to speak were hard words. God showed Jeremiah a vision of a boiling pot from the north. It was a picture of the kingdoms of the north coming to attack Jerusalem. God was angry with the people of Judah. They had ignored his commands, worshiped other gods, and wandered from the good paths they used to walk in.

Sounds like an unpopular message. And it was! No one liked Jeremiah. They wanted him to announce good news. But sometimes the only way to get to the good news is to hear the bad news first. The Lord said, “Don’t be discouraged, Jeremiah. I will make you like a strong city, like an iron pillar, like bronze walls. The people will fight against you, but they will not win.”

Jeremiah is sometimes called the weeping prophet because he had to give such bad news and saw so many hard things. But he was also a faithful prophet. Like Jeremiah, we must always say and do what is right. God will be with us, even if everyone is against us.

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**PRAYER:** Give us the courage to obey your word and speak your truth. No matter what. Amen.





# The Valley of Dry Bones

EZEKIEL 37

**T**he longest prophetic books in the Bible are Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. Isaiah was God's messenger before Assyria overtook Israel in the north. Jeremiah was God's messenger as Babylon overtook Judah in the south. And Ezekiel was God's messenger while the people were exiles in Babylon. Ezekiel announced the bad news of Israel's sin, the good news of God's deliverance, and the glorious news of a brand-new world to come.

Ezekiel also announced good news to a valley of dry bones.

One day, the Lord carried Ezekiel away in the Spirit and set him down in the middle of a valley. The valley was full of bones, lots and lots of bones, very dry bones. It must have been a strange sight, maybe even a little scary.

God said to Ezekiel, "Do you think these bones can live?" "Um, you know the answer to that," Ezekiel answered. Then the Lord God told Ezekiel to do something odd. "I want you to talk to the bones," he said. "I want you to prophesy over these bones and say, 'O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD!'"





And that's exactly what Ezekiel did. Very strange. But not as strange and amazing as what happened next. As Ezekiel was speaking, there was a rattling and the bones started coming together. It looked like an army of skeletons. And then skin wrapped around the bones.

But they still couldn't move. There was no breath in the bones. So the Lord told Ezekiel to call forth the wind to fill the dead bodies. And breath came into them, and they lived and stood on their feet. The dry bones had come to life.





Why did God give Ezekiel such a vision? Was he making plans for Halloween? No. The vision was not about haunted houses but about the house of Israel. “These bones represent my people,” the Lord said. “They’re dried up. They’re cut off. They’re hopeless and dead. But I will bring them back to life.” This is the way it is with all of us without God in our lives. We may be alive in our bodies, but we are spiritually dead. Only by the word of God can we be brought back to life.

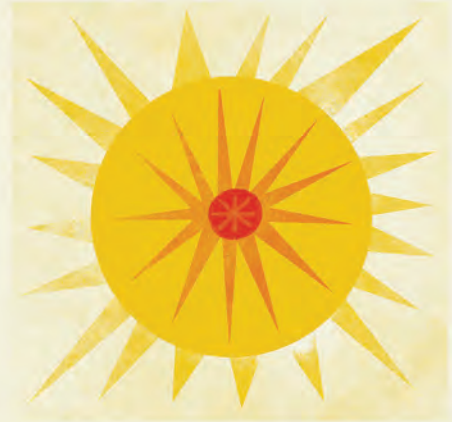


“I will put my Spirit within you,” the Lord told his people, “and you shall live.” God had not forgotten the covenant he made with Abraham. “My dwelling place shall be with them,” he said, “and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.”

Praise God that he remembers his covenant, even when we forget. Praise God that he gave us life when we were dead. Praise God that he knows how to make dry bones stand up and breathe.

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**PRAYER:** Thank you for the promise of your covenant and the power of your word. Give us life. Amen.



# The Fiery Furnace

DANIEL 3



**W**hen the Israelites were exiles in Babylon, they had to figure out how to serve God as strangers in a strange land. Back in Judah, they had their own king, their own religion, and their own rules. Now they had to figure out how to be faithful to God while still being friendly in their new home.

Sometimes living as an exile was hard but not too complicated. The king might give them freedom to worship their own God in their own way. Or he might appreciate the Israelites for their hard work. The Jews could get along with the Babylonians as long as the Babylonians didn't mind the Jews believing and acting like Jews!

But that wasn't always the case. Sometimes, serving God and serving the Babylonians just didn't go together. And when that happened, there was only one thing to do: put God first.



One time King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold almost one hundred feet high and commanded everyone to worship the image. And “everyone” included the Jews. Nebuchadnezzar was asking them to break a whole bunch of the Ten Commandments. Actually, he wasn’t *asking* anyone. The king issued a decree that whoever refused to worship the image would be thrown into a burning fiery furnace.

Now what would you do? Maybe bow down on one knee, but not really mean it in your heart? Maybe go along with the king’s command and ask God to forgive you later? The Jews were in a tough situation. But the right thing is the right thing.





There were three Jews who worked for the king who refused to bow to the golden image. Their Hebrew names were Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, but you might know them by their Babylonian names: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. “Our God can save us from the fire,” they said, “but even if he doesn’t, we will not worship your gods or bow down to your golden image.”



Nebuchadnezzar was furious. He ordered the furnace heated seven times hotter, and he had the men thrown into the flames. But when the king looked in the furnace, he didn't see the three men burning up. In fact, he didn't see three men at all. He saw four! And the fourth one was real shiny. So the king called them out and blessed the God who sent his angel to save Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Then he promoted them to even greater authority in Babylon.

We'd like to think that nothing bad will happen to us if we do the right thing, except we know that's not the way things always work. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego didn't know what God would do, but they knew right from wrong.

There is only one God who deserves to be worshiped and only one King whose commands are always true. And when the way of the world opposes the way of God, we ought to know which way to go.

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**PRAYER:** Thank you for the example of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. May we never put any earthly king or man-made commands before you. Amen.

