

The Bones of the Prophet

(Compiled by Paul R. Blake)

Introduction:

- A. Humankind is fascinated with human bodies after they die.
 - 1. Every culture seems to have developed a preservation and burial ritual.
 - 2. A large percentage of the lasting monuments from the past are tombs (pyramids, Taj Mahal, Indian mounds, Chinese ceramic army)
 - 3. There are more cemeteries in the world than there are schools, colleges, government buildings, and hospitals combined.
 - 4. Much of our literature and entertainment focuses on the dead (Frankenstein, Dracula, horror folklore, books, and zombie movies)
 - 5. How much of contemporary medicine has its roots in the ancients examining and preserving the bodies of the dead? (Anatomy, physiology, organ function, disease processes)
 - 6. Many religious systems and cults are obsessed with the dead (Voodoo, Galiema, Catholicism, Shintoism)
 - 7. Frauds claim to speak to them, and many believe that the remains of the dead have power (Relics, bones, hair, nails, teeth)
- B. The point is: the living believe the dead have power.
 - 1. "The evil that men do lives after them; the good is oft interred with their bones." (William Shakespeare)
 - 2. Some have developed rituals to keep them safe from the dead (Witchcraft, sin eaters, charms)
- C. The Bible teaches that the dead have no power in this world to physically impact the living; only their influence lives on.
 - 1. Ecc. 9:4-6, 10; Job 7:9-10; 2Sam. 12:23; Psalm 115:17
 - 2. Only the power of influence - Heb. 11:4
 - 3. Does the Bible speak of power in dead bones of prophets?

I. THE BONES OF ELISHA

- A. 2Kings 13:14, 20-21 - Read and exegete
- B. Blessings from bones?
 - 1. It is a comment on truth in a Christian's life and the quality of his service to God to say that "he died well."
 - 2. Elijah was gathered by God in a fiery chariot; Elisha died of an illness of old age, but their departures are measured by their lives, not the other way around
 - 3. Regardless of how we pass from this life, if we lived well for the Lord, then "we will "caught up to meet the Lord in the air" (1Thes. 4:17).
 - 4. Notice the Bible's economy of words. "And Elisha died and they buried him" (13:20). This suggests that the end of life and the disposition of the body are less important than the disposition of the soul.
 - 5. This is supported by the fact that the Jews have very few preservation and funeral rites. Wash the body and bury it in 24 hours.

C. Or gift from God?

1. In truth, there was no inherent power in the bones of Elisha, any more than there was power in Aaron's rod that budded, or Moses staff that parted the Red Sea, or in the burning bush that was not consumed, or in the hem of Jesus' robe that healed the woman, etc.
2. God can and has often used powerless, inanimate objects to accomplish His will, even in an obviously miraculous manner
3. The power was from God, not the bones.

II THE TESTIMONY OF ELISHA'S BONES

A. A man of God died, but his Lord is still alive.

1. When Elisha died, Israel's hope seemed to die with him - 2Kings 13:14
2. When the dead man arose upon the touch of the prophet's bones, it delivered a vivid image that though the prophet is gone, hope is not gone because the God who sent Elisha and His message is still powerful enough to revive even spiritually dead Israel
3. His power is present; His promise is permanent - 2Kings 13:19, 25
4. Trust the Lord who is alive, active, and almighty - Psalm 118:8
5. What do the bones of the prophet say to us today?
 - a. John 14:19; Phil 3:21

B. A man of God died, but his influence remained

1. The influence of men like Darwin and Marx go on ministering death long after their deaths. They have cursed the world with systems of falsehood spawned from their unbelief and evil.
2. Howard Sugden tells of an experience while walking in a cemetery at Huntsville, Michigan. He passed before a number of gravestones until he saw a large tomb with this inscription on it: "To a lost cause." His heart sank in sadness and his day seemed darker. Then he passed by another one with the name of the deceased and this verse from a hymn on it: "The love of Christ doth me constrain: to seek the wandering souls of men: with pleadings, cries and tears to save." He took off his hat and prayed, "O Lord, this man lived a hundred and some years ago, but he has spoken to me today. Over there is a lost cause, but here is a man who lives on."
3. Elisha's life and message in this world still spoke to Israel after his passing, and it continues to speak today, just as Jehoahaz's evil influence spoke then and continues to speak today. The difference is not just in the message, but also in the product of the message.
4. We are writing words today by means of our lives that will continue to speak after our deaths. What are you saying today after your passing?
5. The reason for his influence? He preached God's prophecies faithfully and manifested God's power in his life. His influence abides after his death, because he abided with God in life.

a. Eph. 1:19, 3:20

C. A man of God died, but his work continued

1. 2Kings 13:21 - Dead bones have no magical powers. But God used Elisha, long after his body crumbled into dust.
2. It is often when God's servants die that the fruit of their labor ripens.

3. Luke Short was an Englishman who immigrated to the US in the late eighteenth century. He was converted at the age of 103 years. It happened one hot afternoon that he was meditating under a tree in Virginia, recalling a sermon he had heard preached by John Flavel in Plymouth England when he was a boy 90 years ago. Flavel died in 1791. As he thought about the message he heard 90 years ago, he decided to obey the Gospel. Three years after his baptism, Luke Short died. On his gravestone there is this epitaph: "Here lies the body of Luke Short, Aged according to nature 106 years, Aged according to grace 3 years."

a. 1Cor. 3:6

4. "Let us not rust out. Let us not glide through this world and then slip quietly out of it without having blown the trumpet loud and long for our Blessed Redeemer. At the very least, let us see to it that when the Devil gets news of our departure from the battlefield, he throws a thanksgiving party in hell." (C. T. Studd)

D. A man of God died, but God had other messages to teach through his life

1. God uses the dust of departed saints to remind us of their holy lives

a. Num. 23:10

2. The dust of the godly dead bears witness that they are still living. It tells us that a physical body is not strong enough to house an eternal spirit for very long.

a. 1Cor. 15:51-57; 2Cor. 5:4

b. The bones and dust stand in stark contrast with the soul that cannot decay or be destroyed - Ecc. 12:7

3. The dust testifies that God still has a relationship with His children even after their deaths, and that they will live with Him again

a. Isa. 25:8-9; Hosea 13:14

Conclusion:

A. 2Cor. 5:1-10