

Ezekiel Told About a Future Hope

BIBLE PASSAGE: Ezekiel 37

MAIN POINT: God planned to bring His people back to their land and give them new life.

KEY PASSAGE: Ezekiel 11:19-20

BIG PICTURE QUESTION: Why should we obey God? We obey God because He loves us.

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Leader BIBLE STUDY

Ezekiel had a tough job: ministering to people who had rejected God and suffered the consequences. The exiled people of Judah were eager to blame God for their circumstances. “It’s not fair!” they argued. (See Ezek. 18:25.)

Ezekiel told the people that they were at fault for their exile; their faithlessness had provoked God’s wrath. The people were getting what they deserved. “I take no pleasure in anyone’s death,” God said. “So repent and live!” (Ezek. 18:32).

God gave Ezekiel a vision. In this vision, God showed Ezekiel a valley of dry bones. The bones represented Israel.

Ezekiel prophesied that God would put tendons, flesh, and skin on the bones. He would put breath in them so they would come to life.

Ezekiel encouraged the exiles. Apart from God, they were dead. But God was offering them life. He would restore their future. “My dwelling place will be with them,” God said. “I will be their God, and they will be My people” (Ezek. 37:27).

We too are dead in our sin. (Eph. 2:1) Sin separates us from God because He is holy. We are apart from God’s presence. But God does not delight in our death. He is patient and wants us to repent and live!

Hundreds of years after Ezekiel died, God’s presence came to His people through Jesus Christ, *Immanuel*—meaning, “God with us.” Jesus is the source of life; He offers us living water. (John 4:10,14) If we do not drink of it, we will become like the dry bones. No life will be in us.

Christ changes that. Evangelical Christian apologist Ravi Zacharias wrote, “Jesus does not offer to make bad people good but to make dead people alive.”¹ Indeed, He does. God saves us by grace, making us alive with Christ through the Holy Spirit. (Eph. 2:4-5)

1. Ravi Zacharias. “Threads of a Redeemed Heart,” *Ravi Zacharias International Ministries* [online], 28 August 2013 [cited 21 September 2015]. Available from the Internet: www.rzim.org.



Additional resources for each session are available at gospelproject.com. For free training and session-by-session help, visit www.ministrygrid.com/web/thegospelproject.

Ezekiel Told About a Future Hope

Ezekiel 37

God had allowed the Babylonians to take over Judah. **God's people were taken to Babylon as slaves.** Ezekiel, one of God's prophets, was in Babylon. **God gave Ezekiel visions so he could tell God's people about the future.** A vision is like a dream, but Ezekiel was awake.

In one vision, God led Ezekiel through a valley filled with old, dry bones. God asked Ezekiel, "Can these bones come to life?"

Ezekiel replied, "Lord God, only You know the answer to that question."

God said, "Speak to these bones for Me. Say, 'This is what God says: I will put breath in you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am God.'"

Ezekiel spoke to the bones. Suddenly, there was a noise—a rattling sound. The bones were coming together: bones to bones, tendons to bones, flesh over bones, and skin over flesh. **But there was no breath in the bones.**

God said, "Speak to the breath for Me. Say, 'This is what God says: Breath, come into these bones so that they may live!'"

Ezekiel did what God said, and the breath entered the bones. They came to life, and a vast army stood before Ezekiel.

Then God said to Ezekiel, "These bones are like My people of Israel. I want you to speak to them for Me."

The people of Israel were sad. They had been taken from their homes. They were living in another country and serving another king. **God told Ezekiel to say, "This is**

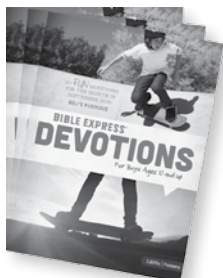
what God says: I am going to bring My people back to the land of Israel. I will put My Spirit in you, and you will live.”

Another message came to Ezekiel. God told him to write on a stick: *This stick belongs to Judah and his friends, the people of Israel.* Then God told Ezekiel to write on a second stick: *This stick belongs to Joseph and his friends, the people of Israel.* The first stick represented the Southern Kingdom of Judah, and the second stick represented the Northern Kingdom of Israel.

God told Ezekiel to hold the sticks together in one hand so they would become one single stick. God explained that His people would be one nation. They would have a new king to rule over them and guide them. God said, “My people will live forever in the land I gave to their ancestors.”

God would make a covenant of peace with His people forever. “I will be with them,” God said. “I will be their God, and they will be My people. Then everyone will know that I am the Lord.”

Christ Connection: God showed Ezekiel a valley of dry bones. The dry bones remind us what we are like when we sin. God showed Ezekiel His power to make dead people alive. We see God’s power at the cross. Jesus died to save sinners. God raised Jesus from the dead, and He gives us eternal life.



**WANT TO
DISCOVER
GOD'S WORD?
GET
BIBLE EXPRESS!**

Invite kids to check out this week's devotionals to discover that God's people felt sad and alone in a foreign land. God's promise through Ezekiel is still true for us today. One day, we will live with God for all eternity. (Ezek. 37:27) Order in bulk, subscribe quarterly, or purchase individually. For more information, check out www.lifeway.com/devotionals.

Small Group OPENING

SESSION TITLE: Ezekiel Told About a Future Hope

BIBLE PASSAGE: Ezekiel 37

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KEY PASSAGE: Ezekiel 11:19-20

BIG PICTURE QUESTION: Why should we obey God? We obey God because He loves us.

Welcome time

Greet each kid as he or she arrives. Use this time to collect the offering, fill out attendance sheets, and help new kids connect to your group. Invite kids to share if they have ever broken a bone. How did it happen? How long did they wear a cast? What color was their cast?

SAY • Thank you for sharing your experiences! I am glad we have doctors that can help our bones heal. Today we are going to hear about a vision the prophet Ezekiel had. Ezekiel saw God bring dead bones to life!

Activity page (5 minutes)

- “Secret Message” activity page, 1 per kid
- crayons or markers

Challenge kids to complete the “Secret Message” on the activity page. Guide kids to follow the instructions for coloring in the spaces in the picture.

When kids finish, the scattered bones colored blue should spell out the name *EZEKIEL*.

SAY • Today we are going to hear a Bible story about Ezekiel. God used a valley of bones to show Ezekiel what He was going to do. God was going to do something wonderful for His people, and He wanted Ezekiel to tell them about it.

Session starter (10 minutes)

OPTION 1: Gather them up

Form groups of three or four kids. Give each group a different colored stack of paper. Instruct the kids to use the paper to form three paper wads per player.

Allow kids a minute or two to toss their paper wads around the room. Then gather the kids in their groups. Explain that when you say go, each team should race to collect its paper wads. The first group to collect all of its paper wads wins. Play again as time allows, allowing groups to toss other groups' papers.

SAY • Good job, everyone! In this game, you gathered your papers that were scattered all over the room. Today's Bible story is about a promise God made to His people through the prophet Ezekiel. God promised to gather them together. Let's get ready to hear more!

OPTION 2: Balloon bones

Form two teams. Give each team a roll of tape and several small inflated balloons of various shapes and sizes. Make sure each team has the same number of balloons.

Challenge teams to use the tape to attach the balloons to one of their players. Allow several minutes for teams to work. Then call time and invite each balloon "model" to move around to bring life to the balloons.

SAY • You really made these balloons come to life! Today we are going to hear a Bible story about a time the prophet Ezekiel had a vision. God put breath in bones and brought them to life! Incredible!



- colored paper, different color per group

- masking tape or painter's tape, 2 rolls
- small inflated balloons of various shapes and sizes
- Allergy Alert download

Transition to large group

Large Group LEADER

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Countdown

• countdown video

Show the countdown video as your kids arrive, and set it to end as large group time begins.

Introduce the session (3 minutes)

• leader attire
• keys
• flashlight

[Large Group Leader enters wearing a security officer's uniform—black pants and a blue shirt. Leader carries a large set of keys and a flashlight, carefully scanning the room as he or she enters. Leader is relieved to see the kids.]

LEADER • Boy, am I glad to see you! Whew. [*Wipe forehead and glance offstage.*] I wasn't sure I was going to make it out of there in one piece! I was just walking through the Old Testament wing of the Bible exhibit, and I heard this strange noise. It was a clattering sound! I carefully walked into the room about Jeremiah and the Israelites' captivity, and you won't believe what I saw! These old bones were moving around in one of the displays! I got out of there as fast as I could.

Fortunately, it turns out it's actually a new demonstration to help people learn about the story of Ezekiel. Let's get ready to see what that's about.

Giant timeline (1 minute)

Show the giant timeline, briefly reviewing previous Bible stories. Then point to today's Bible story.

• Giant Timeline

LEADER • We have been learning about the prophet

Jeremiah and his message to God's people.

Remember, the people of Judah had disobeyed God, so **God sent Judah into captivity because of their sin.** Today's Bible story is called "Ezekiel Told About a Future Hope." Ezekiel was a prophet too. God gave Ezekiel visions that showed what would happen in the future. Wow!

Big picture question (1 minute)

LEADER • Now, before we get to the Bible story, let's review our big picture question and answer. Remember, God's people were in captivity because they disobeyed God. We know that we can't do anything to earn God's favor. So, *why should we obey God?*

Today's Bible story is a good reminder of God's promises for us. *We obey God because He loves us.*

Tell the Bible story (10 minutes)

Open your Bible to Ezekiel 37. Tell the Bible story in your own words, or show the Bible story video "Ezekiel Told About a Future Hope."

• Bibles
• "Ezekiel Told About a Future Hope" video
• Big Picture Question Poster
• Bible Story Picture Poster

LEADER • Isn't it amazing the way God communicated the message He wanted Ezekiel to share with the people of Judah? God was clear in His message to Ezekiel.

God planned to bring His people back to their land and give them new life.

Let's review it to make sure we understand what God had to say to His people.

Ask the following review questions:

1. Ezekiel's vision led him through a valley. What filled the valley? (*bones, Ezek. 37:1*)
2. What did God ask Ezekiel about the bones? (*Can these bones live? Ezek. 37:3*)
3. What was Ezekiel's answer to God? (*Only You know, Ezek. 37:3*)
4. What happened to the bones when Ezekiel spoke God's words to them? (*The bones came together. Tendons and flesh came over them; Ezek. 37:7-8*)
5. What was missing from the bones? (*breath, Ezek. 37:8*)
6. What caused the bones to come to life? (*Ezekiel spoke God's words commanding the breath to come into the bones, Ezek. 37:9-10*)
7. Who were these bones like? (*They were like the people of Israel, and God wanted Ezekiel to speak to them for Him; Ezek. 37:11-14*)
8. What two things were in the next vision from God to Ezekiel? (*two sticks, Ezek. 37:16*)
9. Whom did each stick belong to? (*Judah and his friends, Joseph and his friends; Ezek. 37:16*)
10. When the two sticks became one, what did that represent? (*God's people would be one nation, Ezek. 37:21-22*)

LEADER • God used His power to bring dry, dead bones to life. The dry bones remind us what we are like when we sin. We aren't just sick or injured in our sin; the Bible says that apart from Jesus, we are *dead* in our sin. God showed Ezekiel His power to make dead people alive.

We see God's power at the cross. Jesus died to save

sinners. God raised Jesus from the dead, and He gives us eternal life.

The Gospel: God's Plan for Me (optional)

Use Scripture and the guide provided with this session to explain to boys and girls how to become a Christian. Assign individuals to meet with kids who have more questions.

Encourage boys and girls to ask their parents, small group leaders, or other Christian adults any questions they may have about becoming a Christian.

Tip: Provide *I'm a Christian Now* for new Christians to take home and complete with their families.

Key passage (5 minutes)

Show the key passage poster. Lead the boys and girls to read together Ezekiel 11:19-20. Then guide kids to read the key passage again, this time in a dull, monotone voice. For an added emphasis, guide kids to also lay on their backs as they say the key passage.

- Key Passage Poster
- "One Heart" song

LEADER • Let's put some life into that! This time, let's say our key passage with expression and enthusiasm!

Guide kids to stand and recite the key passage again, this time with life and enthusiasm!

LEADER • **God planned to bring His people back to their land and give them new life.** Our key passage tells us more about God's plan for His people. He promised to bring them together and change their hearts, giving them power to love and obey Him.

Invite kids to sing "One Heart" together.

Discussion starter video (4 minutes)

LEADER • Are you ready for a quiz? Don't worry; this will be fun. Check this out.

Show the "Unit 15, Session 4" discussion starter video.

- "Unit 15, Session 4" discussion starter video

LEADER • How can you tell if something is alive? Can something that is actually dead appear to be alive? [*Allow kids to discuss.*] God promised to change His people. **God planned to bring His people back to their land and give them new life.**

Apart from Jesus, we are spiritually dead in our sin. When we trust in Jesus, He makes us alive—like the dry bones that came to life. Jesus gives us eternal life. We can share this good news with others!

Sing (4 minutes)

• “A Way for Us” song

LEADER • No one is like God! He deserves our worship and our praise. Let’s spend time worshipping Him through song today. As you sing these words, think about the power and love of our great God.

Sing together “A Way for Us.”

Pray (2 minutes)

Invite kids to pray before dismissing to small groups.

LEADER • Let’s gather in a circle and link arms to remind us what God’s message was through the dry, dead bones.

Dear God, only You can make dry, dead bones come to life. The bones remind us what we are like when we sin. Lord, help us understand that You are the only One who can take away our sin and give us new life. Thank You for Jesus! We love You. Amen.

Dismiss to small groups

The Gospel: God's Plan for Me

Ask kids if they have ever heard the word *gospel*. Clarify that the word *gospel* means “good news.” It is the message about Christ, the kingdom of God, and salvation. Use the following guide to share the gospel with kids.



God rules. Explain to kids that the Bible tells us God created everything, and He is in charge of everything. Invite a volunteer to read Genesis 1:1 from the Bible. Read Revelation 4:11 or Colossians 1:16-17 aloud and explain what these verses mean.



We sinned. Tell kids that since the time of Adam and Eve, everyone has chosen to disobey God. (Romans 3:23) The Bible calls this sin. Because God is holy, God cannot be around sin. Sin separates us from God and deserves God's punishment of death. (Romans 6:23)



God provided. Choose a child to read John 3:16 aloud. Say that God sent His Son, Jesus, the perfect solution to our sin problem, to rescue us from the punishment we deserve. It's something we, as sinners, could never earn on our own. Jesus alone saves us. Read and explain Ephesians 2:8-9.



Jesus gives. Share with kids that Jesus lived a perfect life, died on the cross for our sins, and rose again. Because Jesus gave up His life for us, we can be welcomed into God's family for eternity. This is the best gift ever! Read Romans 5:8; 2 Corinthians 5:21; or 1 Peter 3:18.



We respond. Tell kids that they can respond to Jesus. Read Romans 10:9-10,13. Review these aspects of our response: Believe in your heart that Jesus alone saves you through what He's already done on the cross. Repent, turning from self and sin to Jesus. Tell God and others that your faith is in Jesus.

Offer to talk with any child who is interested in responding to Jesus.

Small Group LEADER

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BIG PICTURE QUESTION: Why should we obey God? We obey God because He loves us.

Key passage activity (5 minutes)

- Key Passage Poster
- “Key Passage Bones” printable

Print and cut apart the key passage bones in your preferred translation. If your group is large, print more than one set and form smaller groups.

Display the key passage poster. Allow kids who have memorized the key passage to recite it. Then guide everyone to read it aloud together.

Distribute the verse bones. Challenge the kids to arrange the words and phrases in the correct order.

SAY • We learned in today’s Bible story that only God can give new life. He can bring dry, dead bones to life and—like our key passage says—He can remove a heart of stone, a heart that is hard and resistant to Him, and replace it with a heart of flesh, one that loves Him and wants to obey Him.

Bible story review & Bible skills (10 minutes)

- Bibles, 1 per kid
- Main Point Poster
- large sheets of paper
- markers

Guide kids to open their Bibles to Ezekiel 37. Form groups of three or four kids—boys with boys, and girls with girls. Give each group paper large enough for a kid to lay on.

Instruct a volunteer in each group to lay on her back while the other kids carefully trace an outline of her

body. Then direct the kids to draw bones in the outline. Encourage them to write words or phrases of the main point on the bones: **God planned to bring His people back to their land and give them new life.**

As kids work, read the following statements and ask them to determine if each is true or false:

1. God had allowed the Ninevites to take over Judah. (*false, the Babylonians; 2 Chron. 36:20*)
2. God led Ezekiel through a valley filled with old, dry sticks. (*false, filled with bones; Ezek. 37:1*)
3. God told Ezekiel to speak to the bones. Ezekiel did, but nothing happened. (*False, they came together; Ezek. 37:7*)
4. God told Ezekiel to hold the sticks together in one hand so they would become one single stick. (*true, Ezek. 37:16-17*)
5. God explained that His people would be one nation. (*true, Ezek. 37:19*)
6. We obey God to make Him love us more. (*False, we obey God because He loves us.*)
7. **God planned to bring His people back to their land and give them new life.** (*true, Ezek. 37:21*)

SAY • We learned many things in today's Bible story. Even though God's people had sinned, **God planned to bring His people back to their land and give them new life.**

The dry bones in Ezekiel's vision remind us what we are like when we sin. Sin separates us from God, and apart from Him, we are spiritually dead. The power of God at the cross through Jesus can save people from their sin. It can bring people to new life in Jesus Christ.

Option: Retell or review the Bible story using the bolded text of the Bible story script.

Option: Review the gospel with boys and girls. Explain that kids are welcome to speak with you or another teacher if they have questions.

A circular icon with a dark background and a white border. Inside the circle, the words "LOW PREP" are written in white, uppercase letters. The circle is slightly tilted and has a subtle shadow effect.

LOW PREP

- craft sticks, 5 per kid
- markers

Activity choice (10 minutes)

OPTION 1: Connect two

Give each kid five craft sticks and a marker. Instruct kids to label their sticks with the numbers 1 through 5. Give the following directions:

1. Hold the sticks with the numbers down so they are hidden in your fist.
2. Find a partner. Each partner will gently draw one stick from the other player's hand.
3. Compare the sticks. If the numbers match, you win! If the numbers do not match, return the sticks and play again.

Encourage kids who draw matching sticks to continue playing. How many times can they draw a pair?

SAY • Does anyone remember what Ezekiel's vision of the two sticks showed? (*God explained that His people would be one nation.*) **God planned to bring His people back to their land and give them new life.**

OPTION 2: Pack it up

Form two teams of kids. Give each player a clothing item, such as a sock or T-shirt. Position a suitcase across the room for each team.

Explain that when you say go, the first player on each team should race to the suitcase, open it up, put her item inside, and close the suitcase before returning to her team. When the first player returns, the second player may begin. The last player will pack his item, close the suitcase, and carry it back to his team. The first team to finish wins.

SAY • Today we learned that **God planned to bring His people back to their land and give them new life.** Can you imagine how excited they were to hear that

they would get to go back to their land? I wonder what they would have taken with them. Through His great love, God forgave His people and blessed them with a future hope.

We have a future hope too. Anyone who trusts in Jesus is forgiven of their sin. Our sin makes us dead, but God makes us alive! He promises that we will live with Him forever.

Journal and prayer (5 minutes)

Distribute journal pages and pencils. Encourage kids to write about or draw a picture of what a person's heart is like before trusting in Jesus.

Remind them that before we trust in Jesus, our hearts are hard like stone. We are against God and focus on ourselves. When we trust in Jesus, God changes our hearts to be open to Him. He gives us power to love and obey Him.

SAY • God spoke to Ezekiel through some pretty amazing visions. We learned today that **God planned to bring His people back to their land and give them new life.** Only God has the power to do that, and only God has the power to save sinners through His Son, Jesus! He forgives their sin and gives them life!

Pray, thanking God for forgiveness and new life in Christ. As time allows, lead kids to complete “Vision Match” on the activity page. Review the visions from the Bible story, what each vision meant, and what it tells us about God.

(Answers: 1. a valley of dry bones came to life, God was going to bring His people to Israel and give them life, God has power to make dead people alive; 2. two sticks became one single stick, God was going to bring His people together as one nation, God is King over His people)

- pencils
- Journal Page
- “Vision Match” activity page, 1 per kid

Tip: Give parents this week's Big Picture Cards for Families to allow families to interact with the biblical content at home.