

## 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.

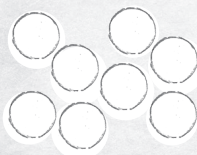
**KEY PASSAGE:** Ezekiel 11:19-20

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

**SMALL GROUP OPENING**

(10–15 MINUTES)

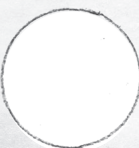
PAGE 206



**LARGE GROUP BIBLE STUDY**

(25–30 MINUTES)

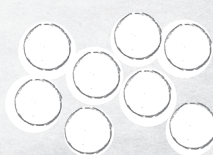
PAGE 208



**SMALL GROUP ACTIVITIES**

(25–30 MINUTES)

PAGE 214



4

### 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 did not come into this world to make bad people good. He came into this world to make dead people alive.” Indeed, He does. God saves us by grace, making us alive with Christ through the Holy Spirit. (Eph. 2:4-5)



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training made simple

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# The BIBLE STORY

## 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**

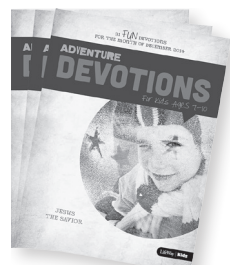
**what God says: I am going to bring My people back to the land of Israel. I will put My Spirit in you, and you will live.”**

**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  
ADVENTURE!**

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](http://www.lifeway.com/devotionals).

# Small Group OPENING

**SESSION TITLE:** 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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## 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. As kids arrive, teach them the technical names of different bones in their bodies. Point to your head (*cranium*), fingers (*phalanges*), arms (*humorous, radius, ulna*), legs (*femur, fibula, tibia*), and so forth. Talk about how God gave us bones to give our bodies structure and take guesses for how many bones people have (270 at birth, but only 206 by adulthood).

**SAY** • Who knew there was so much to know about bones! Today we will learn a story about a man who saw a valley with many bones in it! That could be kind of scary, but we'll learn that what happened wasn't scary. It was amazing!

## Activity page (5 minutes)

Invite kids to complete the “Dry Bones Maze” on the activity page. Instruct them to find the pathway through the maze.

**SAY** • God used a valley with bones in it to send a message of encouragement to His prophet Ezekiel. How

- “Dry Bones Maze” activity page, 1 per kid
- pencils or markers

could a valley of bones be encouraging?! We'll learn about it soon!

## Session starter (10 minutes)

**OPTION 1:** Head, shoulders, knees and toes

Sing “Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes” with your class, pointing to each body part as you sing it. Sing it multiple times, replacing words one by one with “mmm” sounds.

**SAY** • God made our bodies, complete with the bones that give us structure. If it weren't for our bones, we wouldn't have heads, shoulders, knees, or toes! We also have muscles that help us move and organs that let us breath, taste, see, hear, smell, and think! Today we will hear about Ezekiel's vision of some bones that God put together and turned back into whole bodies!

**OPTION 2:** Fix what was broken

Show the class a few objects like craft sticks, pencils, or pieces of paper. Break or tear the objects into two or more pieces. Ask the kids if they can put them back together, just like new. Provide tape, glue, or staples to let them try. Keep hand wipes on hand to clean up any mess.

**SAY** • These are really simple objects. They don't have many parts or moving pieces. But even when these simple objects are broken, it is impossible for us to make them just like new. Imagine if our bodies break down. Do you think we could fix our bodies all on our own if they were broken to pieces? No way! Do you think God could? We'll learn about that soon.



• simple objects like craft sticks, pencils, or paper

Tip: Be careful about sharp edges or splinters!

## 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 guard outfit, carrying keys and a flashlight. Leader paces a few times, scanning the room before noticing the kids.]*

**LEADER** • Hello, everyone! Welcome back to the museum.

We just got our last Bible exhibit display. This one is pretty cool, if I do say so myself. It's designed to help students learn about Ezekiel and his vision of a valley filled with bones! It uses extra special hologram technology to show what it might have looked like to see a bunch of bones come together and come back to life!

Now the bad news is that we haven't gotten it all put together yet; it's got some pretty complicated parts. But the good news is that I can tell you all about the amazing story it is based on.

## Giant timeline (1 minute)

**LEADER** • Now, if you remember what we learned last week, **God sent Judah into captivity because of their sin.** As you can imagine, this made the people extremely sad. They probably felt abandoned by God. Obviously, God did not abandon them. Quite the opposite. Though God was punishing their sin, He sent them a message through His prophet Ezekiel. And it was a very good message! Today’s story is “Ezekiel Told About a Future Hope.”

• Giant Timeline

## Big picture question (1 minute)

**LEADER** • 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 now that we can’t do anything to earn God’s favor. So *why should we obey God? 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.”

**LEADER** • I can only imagine what it would have been like to see what Ezekiel saw. Just think, a whole bunch of dry bones moving together and growing back all the muscle and skin! That would be amazing, but it might give me the heebie-jeebies as well! Ezekiel listened to God and understood that **God planned to bring His people back to their land and give them new life.**

The dry bones reminded God’s people—and it still

- Bibles
- “Ezekiel Told About a Future Hope” video
- Big Picture Question Poster
- Bible Story Picture Poster



reminds us—what we are like when we sin. Without Jesus, we are spiritually dead—like the old, dry bones. We can't have a relationship with God the way we are supposed to, and we are dry and useless from a spiritual perspective. God showed Ezekiel His power to make dead people alive again when He brought the bones back to life.

God showed His power in a similar way later. At the cross, Jesus died to save sinners. On the third day, God raised Jesus from the dead, just like He did to the dry bones. When we trust in Jesus, He gives us eternal life, raising us from the dead spiritually and giving us new hearts that are alive with the power of the Holy Spirit!

Ask the following review questions:

1. Ezekiel's vision led him to 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. God wanted Ezekiel to speak to the people of Israel 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 represent? (*Judah and Israel, Ezek. 37:16*)
10. When the two sticks became one, what did it represent? (*God's people would be one nation, Ezek. 37:21-22*)

## 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. Invite volunteers to read the key passage completely from memory. Alternate reading the key passage together in a dull, lifeless way, and with excitement and liveliness. Then sing the key passage song.

- Key Passage Poster
- "One Heart" song

**LEADER • God planned to bring His people back to their land and give them new life.** In addition, He promised to change their hearts, giving them power to love and obey Him.

## Discussion starter video (4 minutes)

**LEADER •** Have you ever seen something and not known if it were dead or alive? Think about that as you answer the questions in this video.

- "Unit 15, Session 4" discussion starter video

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

Discuss with the kids how they can tell if something is alive, dead, or inanimate (never had life to begin with). Ask them what characteristics they would expect from a spiritually alive person. Ask them if something dead/inanimate could pass for something living and how it might do that.

**LEADER** • Ezekiel saw God take dead bones and bring them back to life in his vision. God brought Jesus back to life too. **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** • I want to take some time to praise our life-giving God right now.

Sing together “A Way for Us.”

### **Pray (2 minutes)**

Invite kids to pray before dismissing to small groups.

**LEADER** • God, thank You for giving life to dead things.

You created each of us and breathed life into us. You sent Jesus to save us from sin so that our hearts can be made alive in You again. Help us to trust You and love You. Show us what it means to be spiritually alive, and help us to live that way for 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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## Key passage activity (5 minutes)

- Key Passage Poster
- “Key Passage Bones” printable
- brass fasteners or tape

Before class, print the “Key Passage Bones” and cut them out. Ask if anyone in your class can say the key passage from memory. Once kids have tried to say the key passage, give them the bones in a scrambled order and allow kids to put them together in the right order. Use brass fasteners or tape to hold them together.

**SAY** • God’s people were living in a land that was not their home. They were sad and wanted to be home again. **God planned to bring His people back to their land and give them new life.** God promised to put a king over them who would rule forever and take away their sins. The King God talked about is Jesus! Jesus died to save us from sin, and He gives us life when we trust in Him. Jesus unites people together into a group called the church, God’s people.

- Bibles, 1 per kid
- Main Point Poster
- white board or chalkboard
- dry erase marker or chalk
- eraser

## Bible story review & Bible skills (10 minutes)

Distribute a Bible to each child. Draw a body (stick figures are fine) on a white board or chalkboard. Ask kids the following questions about the story, directing them to look up in the Bible any answers they do not know. If a kid

answers a question incorrectly, she has one chance to find the verse where the answer can be found, and read it aloud. If she fails to find the verse, erase a body part. Erase parts in the following order: leg, leg, arm, arm, torso, head. Each time they answer correctly on the first try, add a body part back to the figure. If they get through all the questions before the head is erased, they win.

Questions:

1. Who saw the vision of the valley of dry bones?  
(*Ezekiel, Ezek. 1:3; 37:1*)
2. What happened to the bones at first? (*God caused them to come back together and covered them in flesh and skin, Ezek. 37:7-8*)
3. When did the restored bodies come to life? (*when the breath entered them, Ezek. 37:9-10*)
4. What did the bones represent? (*The people of Israel felt hopeless and dead, but God would restore them and fill them with His Spirit; Ezek. 37:11-14*)
5. What did Ezekiel write on the two sticks? (*“Belonging to Judah” and “Belonging to Joseph,” Ezek. 37:16*)
6. What happened to the two sticks, and what did it mean? (*They were joined into one stick by God. God would reunite the two kingdoms under a new King; Ezek. 37:20-24*)

**SAY** • Even when God’s people were in exile (removed from their land), God’s plan was at work. **God planned to bring His people back to their land and give them new life.** God would restore Israel and give them a new King, Jesus! God showed Ezekiel a valley of dry bones. The dry bones remind us what we are like because of sin.

God showed Ezekiel His power to make dead

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

people alive. We see God's power at the cross, too. Jesus died and rose again to save sinners. Jesus gives us eternal life.

## Activity choice (10 minutes)

- empty paper towel tubes, 2 per kid
- markers
- tape
- stickers, glitter pens, or other craft supplies

**OPTION 1:** Two sticks, one stick

Give each child two empty paper towel tubes. Instruct them to write *Judah* on one and *Joseph* on the other. Help them to slightly fold one end of one tube to slip into the other tube, and secure them in place with tape. Allow them to decorate their joined tubes with stickers, markers, glitter pens, or other craft supplies.

**SAY** • **God planned to bring His people back to their land and give them new life** under one king, King Jesus! We can be a part of God's kingdom too, by trusting in Jesus for our salvation. Jesus died on the cross and rose from the dead so that we would have a way to be united with God as His children.

**OPTION 2:** Scatter and gather tag

Select one child to be *Judah* and one child to be *Joseph*. Start the game by calling "Scatter!" All the children must spread out in the room. *Judah* and *Joseph* will run around tagging other kids in the class. A tagged kid must link arms with the kid or chain of kids who tagged him. Once all the kids are in one chain or another, direct the two chains join together. Choose two new kids to be *Judah* and *Joseph*, and then play again.

**SAY** • God punished His people by scattering them to other nations as prisoners. But God never stopped loving them. **God planned to bring His people back to their land and give them new life!** God sent Jesus to



die for our sins, and when we trust in Him, He gives us the Holy Spirit and connects us to God.

## Journal and prayer (5 minutes)

Distribute each child's journal and ask her to write about or draw a picture of what happens when people get old. Ask her about people she knows who may be experiencing such changes as hair turning gray or needing a cane to walk.

**SAY** • Our world is broken by sin. God's perfect creation didn't include our bodies breaking down or dying, but sin causes those problems. We all experience that. Thankfully, Jesus left us with a promise to come back some day and restore earth. People who trust in Jesus will be raised to life and given new bodies that won't get sick or die! Just as God's people in exile longed to return home, we long for Jesus to return and fix everything about our world that is broken.

Make sure each child secures this week's sheet in the journal, and then collect them. Keep the journals in the classroom so they will be available every week or as often as you wish to use them.

If time remains, take prayer requests or allow kids to complete the Bible Story Coloring Page. Pray, praising God for His promise to restore His people. Thank Him for sending Jesus to be our King and bring us together with Him forever! Ask God to help each kid love Him and trust Him with her whole life.

- pencils
- Journal Page
- Bible Story Coloring 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.