

The BIBLE STORY

Ezekiel Told About a Future Hope

Ezekiel 37

God gave Ezekiel another vision. In this vision, God took Ezekiel to a valley. It was filled with bones. The Lord led Ezekiel through the valley. Old, dry bones covered the floor of the valley. They were scattered all over the ground. Then God asked Ezekiel, “Son of man, can these bones come to life?”

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

God gave Ezekiel some instructions. He said, “Speak to these bones for Me. Say, ‘Dry bones, hear the Lord’s words! This is what God says to these bones: I will put breath in you, and you will come to life. I will put tendons on you, make flesh grow on you, and I will cover you with skin. I will give you breath so that you will come to life. Then you will know that I am God.’”

So Ezekiel did what God said. He began to speak to the bones. Suddenly, there was a noise—a rattling sound. Ezekiel looked around. 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. He spoke to the breath, and the breath entered the bones. They came to life, and a vast army stood on their feet before Ezekiel.

Then God said to Ezekiel, “These bones are like My people of Israel. The people say that their bones are dry, that they have no hope. I want you to speak to them for Me.”

The people of Israel had been taken from their homes. They were living in another country and serving another king. God’s people were sad. God told Ezekiel what to say to the people of Israel. He told him to say, “This is what God says: **I am going to open your graves and bring My people out of them and into the land of Israel. You will know that I am God when I bring you up out of your graves.**”

God continued, “I will put My Spirit in you, and you will live. I will make your homes in your own land, and you will know that I am God.”

Another message from God came to Ezekiel. God told Ezekiel to take a stick and write on it: **This stick belongs to Judah and his friends, the people of Israel. Then God told Ezekiel to take a second stick. Ezekiel wrote on the 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 that they would become one single stick. Ezekiel would explain to the people what these sticks meant. God gave Ezekiel these words to say: “**This is what God says: I am going to take My people out of the nations where they are living, and I will bring them into their own land. I will make them into one nation—no longer divided into two kingdoms, the Northern Kingdom and Southern Kingdom.**”

Then God said, “My people will not worship idols anymore and make themselves unholy. **I will save them from the things that have caused them to sin, and I will make them clean. They will be My people, and I will be their God.**”

God planned to give His people a new king—someone who would both rule over the people and act as their shepherd, guiding them in the ways they should go. Then the people would obey God’s laws.

“**My people will live in the land I gave to their ancestors. They will live there forever. Their children will live there forever. Their children’s children will live there forever. Never again will they be taken away from their land. The prince I am sending will be their prince forever.**”

God said He would make a covenant of peace with His people, and this covenant would last 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 had a plan for people who sin. Because Jesus came to earth, died, and was raised to life, He has the power to give us eternal life.

Small Group OPENING

Session Title: Ezekiel Told About a Future Hope

Bible Passage: Ezekiel 37

Big Picture Question: What plan did God show Ezekiel? God planned to bring His people back together in their own land and give them new life.

Key Passage: Ezekiel 37:27

Unit Christ Connection: Though it appeared that sin prevailed, the covenant God promised would be fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

Welcome time

Arriving Activity: Hard to find

- empty baby food jars with lids, 3
- beads of the same color (1 of a different color)
- popcorn kernels
- grain of rice
- pennies
- dime
- Allergy Alert (enhanced CD)

Fill a baby food jar with beads of the same color. Add one different colored bead to the jar. Fill another jar with corn kernels, and add one grain of rice. Fill another jar with pennies and add one dime. Seal and shake the jars until each different item is hidden. Invite the kids to find the different item in each jar, but they must not tell arriving friends. Pass around the jars to give all the kids a chance to look.

Say • What did you find in the jars? Was it hard or almost impossible to find the one thing that was different in each jar? In today's Bible story, something happened that seemed impossible.

Activity page (5 minutes)

Guide boys and girls to complete the activity page.

- "Back Again" activity page, 1 per kid
- markers

Say • God used Ezekiel to deliver a special message. One day, God was going to lead His people back to the land that He promised them through His covenant with Abraham.



Session starter (10 minutes)

Option 1: Ezekiel says

Invite all the kids to lay on the floor. They must lay perfectly still. Play a game similar to "Simon Says," except the kids may only follow the command "Ezekiel says." If Ezekiel says to do something, the kids must stand up and complete the action. If you give a command that doesn't start with "Ezekiel says," the kids must immediately drop to the floor and lay perfectly still again. Any movement before "Ezekiel says" disqualifies that kid for two rounds.

Say • Ezekiel commanded something that normally doesn't move to get up and move. Do you think it did? We will find out.

Option 2: Cotton swab shapes

Scatter cotton swabs over a large area of the floor. Encourage the kids to think of these as small bones. Signal the kids to go, and invite them to race to collect the most "bones." Then, challenge the kids to arrange the bones to make different shapes. Play as time allows.

Say • Imagine telling old bones to come together to make a living person. That's what Ezekiel did in today's Bible story.

Transition to large group

• cotton swabs

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 (1 minute)

• beach attire
• sand
• pan
• cup of water

[Large group leader enters in appropriate beach attire with a bucket of dry sand, a pan, and a cup of water. Demonstrate as you talk about a sandcastle.]

Leader • What's one thing you will always find at a beach?

You will always find sand. How many of you like to play in the sand? Building a sandcastle is a lot of fun, and you must have sand to build one. Do you need anything else? That's right! You must have water—the other thing you always find at the beach. A sandcastle just falls apart without water.

God's people, the Israelites, needed God like sand needs water to be a sandcastle. Without relying on God, they fell apart. Their homes were destroyed, and they were captured by their enemies. In today's Bible story, we will see and hear how God wasn't finished with His people. He still had great plans for them.

• Timeline Map

Timeline map (3 minutes)

Leader • Let's see if you can remember how God's people ended up in the land of their enemies. After many years of disobeying God, God used Babylon to punish the people of Judah for their sins. Before that happened, God sent several prophets to warn Judah. One of those prophets was Jeremiah. *What job did God give Jeremiah? God chose Jeremiah before he was born to be a prophet to the nations.* Jeremiah told the people an army was coming to punish them for their sins. Did they listen? No!

So, God told Jeremiah to write down the words He had given him. Did the people listen to the words and repent? No! God tried to warn them. *Why did Jeremiah warn God's people? God wanted His people to know they were in danger, to stop sinning, and to turn back to Him.* Not only did the people refuse to repent, the king even cut up the written warnings and burned them.

Then God allowed the Babylonians to attack Judah. *How did God punish His people for their sin? God allowed their enemies to capture them and to destroy Jerusalem.* The mighty Babylonians invaded Jerusalem and forced most of God's people to leave. Then they burned the city.

Right before the temple was destroyed, God gave Ezekiel, a prophet, a vision of God's glory leaving the temple. *How did God show He was unhappy with Israel? God's presence left the temple.*

In today's Bible story, God gave Ezekiel another vision with a special message for His people in Babylon.

Big picture question (1 minute)

Leader • Do you think God left His chosen people without any hope for the future? How would I find out the answer

to that question? That's right! I can use my Bible. I hope you have your Bible today. Let's see another question we can answer with the Bible. It's the big picture question. *What plan did God show Ezekiel?*

Sing (5 minutes)

- "Help Me Find It" song

Leader • God still had a plan for the Israelites. God used Ezekiel to help the people find God's plan. Sing together "Help Me Find It."

Key passage (4 minutes)

- Key Passage Slide or Poster
- "My Dwelling Place" song

Leader • God had promised to never leave His people. God wanted to be with His people, but God is holy and can't be around sin. Ezekiel told the people that God would be with them again one day. That day came when Jesus paid for our sin forever by dying on the cross.

Show the slide or poster of the unit's key passage, Ezekiel 37:27. Lead the boys and girls to read the verse together. Sing together "My Dwelling Place."

Tell the Bible story (8 minutes)

- "Ezekiel Told About a Future Hope" video
- Bibles, 1 per kid
- Bible Story Picture Slide or Poster

Leader • Find Ezekiel 37 and let's see the answer to the big picture question, *What plan did God show Ezekiel?*

Show the "Ezekiel Told About a Future Hope" video, or tell the Bible story in your own words using the script provided. For a shorter version of the story, read only the bolded text.

Leader • God gave Ezekiel two visions. One vision was of a valley filled with bones. Are bones alive? No! But God asked Ezekiel if he thought they could live again. Ezekiel said only God knew the answer. God proved He could make the bones alive again. Ezekiel told the bones to come back together, and they did! Then, the bones came to life. God said the vision meant God was going to save

His people, even though they felt like they had no hope. God would bring them back to their land and give them new life.

In the other vision, two sticks became one stick. God told Ezekiel that His people would no longer be divided between Israel and Judah. All God's people would serve Him together. God would save them and give them a king forever. Do you know who that king is? That's right! It's Jesus! This was God's future plan for His people. *What plan did God show Ezekiel? God planned to bring His people back together in their own land and give them new life.*

Ask the following questions:

1. What did God show Ezekiel in the first vision? (*a valley of bones, Ezekiel 37:1*)
2. What did the vision mean? (*God was going to save His people, Ezekiel 37:11-14*)
3. What did the vision with the two sticks mean? (*God's people wouldn't be divided again, Ezekiel 37:20-22*)
4. Who would lead God's people then? (*a forever king, Jesus; Ezekiel 37:25*)
5. *What plan did God show Ezekiel? God planned to bring His people back together in their own land and give them new life.*

- "Unit 18 Session 5" discussion starter video

Discussion starter video (3 minutes)

Leader • Have you ever been sad because something bad happened? Watch this video.

Show the "Unit 18 Session 5" video.

Leader • Like Sprinkles, have you ever been sad because something happened that didn't seem fair? The people of Judah had lost hope. Their homes were gone. God's

presence had left the temple. They were sad, but God hadn't forgotten them. He still loved them but sin separated the Israelites from God. Sin separates us from God too. Just like those bones were given life again, God gives us a new life with Him through Jesus.

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. If this is not possible, encourage boys and girls to ask their parents, small group leaders, or other Christian adults any questions they may have about becoming a Christian.

Prayer (4 minutes)

Show the big picture question slide or poster.

Leader • Let's see who knows the answer to the big picture question, *What plan did God show Ezekiel? God planned to bring His people back together in their own land and give them new life.*

Form three groups of kids, and encourage them to play an echo game. Say the big picture question. Group 1 will say the first word. Group 2 will echo it, and then group 3. Direct each group when it is their turn. Continue until kids give the entire answer. Repeat if time allows.

Before transitioning to small group, make any necessary announcements. Lead the kids in prayer. Ask God to forgive us when we don't trust Him in all things.

Dismiss to small groups

• Big Picture Question
Slide or Poster

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 Slide or Poster
- dry erase board and markers (optional)
- craft sticks
- markers

Make sure the key passage, Ezekiel 37:27, is visible for each child, either as the printed poster or written on a dry erase board. Read the verse together.

Say • These are Ezekiel's words. God promised to have a special relationship with His people. The Israelites were His chosen people in the Old Testament. ***What plan did God show Ezekiel? God planned to bring His people back together in their own land and give them new life.*** Now, God's people are all those who repent and trust in Jesus.

Hide or cover the key passage poster. Form several groups, and give each group enough craft sticks to write two words of the key passage on each stick. Explain that each team must write two words on each stick until the key passage is complete. The first team to finish is the winner. After one minute, allow teams to use their Bibles to write the verse if needed. Invite the teams to mix up the sticks, and see who can put them in order first.

- Bibles, 1 per kid
- Small Group Visual Pack
- Big Picture Question Slide or Poster

Bible story review (10 minutes)

Help the kids find Ezekiel 37 in their Bibles.

Say • Which division of the Bible is Ezekiel in? (*Major Prophets*) Ezekiel was a prophet to the Israelites who were taken from Judah to Babylon. Ezekiel saw God's presence leave the temple. He also saw that God had the power to save them and had promised to bring them back together too.

Use the small group visual pack to show kids where today's Bible story is on the timeline. Review the Bible story provided using the bolded text, or summarize the story in your own words.

Play "Which Bone Would You Use?" Ask the kids to guess which of three bones would best apply to each question below. Point to each bone on your body as you give the answers.

Tip: Use the following list to help identify the bones mentioned.

- tibia: shinbone
- mandible: jawbone
- patella: knee bone
- femur: thigh bone
- sternum: breastbone
- radius: inner forearm
- phalanges: fingers
- ribs: rib cage
- skull: head

- Which bone did Ezekiel use to speak to the people about God's plan: A) tibia, B) mandible, C) patella? (*B. mandible, or a jawbone*)
- Which bones might Ezekiel have used to walk in the valley of dry bones: A) femur, B) sternum, C) radius? (*A. femur, or a leg bone*)
- Which 24 bones would have moved when the bones came back to life and breathed: A) phalanges, B) ribs, C) tibia? (*B. ribs, rib cage moves during breathing*)
- Which bones might Ezekiel have used to hold the two sticks that became one: A) ribs, B) skull, C) phalanges? (*C. phalanges, or bones in the fingers*)
- Which bones might Ezekiel have used to kneel in prayer: A) patella, B) skull, C) radius? (*A. patella, or knee bone*)
- Which bones might Ezekiel have used to point to God: A) ribs, B) skull, C) phalanges? (*C. phalanges, or bones in the fingers*)

Say • God’s message to Ezekiel and the Israelites was that if God can make bones alive again, He can easily rescue His people. God’s next rescue was forever through a king who rules over all of God’s people. That includes you and me if we repent and trust in Jesus as Savior and Lord.

Show the big picture question slide or poster.

Say • *What plan did God show Ezekiel? God planned to bring His people back together in their own land and give them new life.*

Activity choice (10 minutes)

Option 1: Two equals one

Write each of the following Scripture references on two craft sticks to play a matching game: *Ezekiel 37:20; Ezekiel 37:22; Ezekiel 37:24; Ezekiel 37:26; and Ezekiel 37:27.* Give each kid one of the sticks. Challenge each kid to find the person with the matching stick. If you have more than 10 kids, make three or four matching sticks for each verse. Tell the kids how many matching sticks they are looking for, or hide the matching sticks in the room. Once the kids find all the matches, they must look up the verse and be ready to read it to the entire group. If you have non-readers, ask a leader to read the verse.

Say • God used a vision of two sticks becoming one to show that God’s divided people would be one group of people again. This was God’s plan. *What plan did God show Ezekiel? God planned to bring His people back together in their own land and give them new life.*

Option 2: Bone necklace

Cut white plastic straws and a few multi-colored straws into



- craft sticks
- marker
- Bibles, 1 per kid

- straws
- scissors
- yarn
- markers
- permanent marker

1-inch pieces, which you will call “bones.” Give each kid several “bones” and a 20-inch piece of yarn to thread them. Tie a large knot on one end of the yarn and encourage the kids to connect the bones by alternating the white pieces with the colored pieces until a few inches are left at the top. Tie the two ends of the yarn together to create a bone necklace. Write the key passage reference *Ezekiel 37:27* on the middle straw.

Say • You connected these pieces to make a necklace, and God connected the bones Ezekiel saw to form a living person. This was how God shared His plan with Ezekiel and the Israelites. *What plan did God show Ezekiel? God planned to bring His people back together in their own land and give them new life.*

Journal and prayer (5 minutes)

Distribute each child’s journal and the journal page provided with this session. Instruct the kids to draw a picture of Jesus as King. Writers can write the key passage.

Say • Let’s say the big picture question and answer together one more time. *What plan did God show Ezekiel? God planned to bring His people back together in their own land and give them new life.*

Make sure each child puts 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 coloring page provided with this session. Pray, thanking God for giving us hope when a situation seems hopeless. Pray for each child by name, asking God to help him seek the new life God promises through Jesus.

- journals
- Journal Page, 1 per kid (enhanced CD)
- markers or crayons
- Bible Story Coloring Page