Use Week of:

Unit 15 • Session 6

Ezekiel Gave Hope

BIBLE PASSAGE:
Ezekiel 37

STORY POINT:
God planned to bring His people home and give them new life.

KEY PASSAGE:
2 Chronicles 7:14

BIG PICTURE QUESTION:
How did God plan to fix what sin broke? Before He created the world, God planned to send the Messiah to save sinners.

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Additional resources are available at gospelproject.com. For free training and session-by-session help, visit MinistryGrid.com/gospelproject.

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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 be like the dry bones. No life will be in us.

Jesus changes that. He brings life to the spiritually dead. God saves us by grace, making us alive with Christ through the Holy Spirit. (Eph. 2:4-5)

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Ezekiel Gave Hope

Ezekiel 37

God had allowed the Babylonians to take over Judah. Now God's people were living in Babylon as slaves. **Ezekiel the prophet had been taken with God's people to Babylon. Even in captivity, God gave Ezekiel visions so he could tell God's people about the future.**

One day, God gave Ezekiel a 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.**

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

Then another message came to Ezekiel. **God told Ezekiel to hold two sticks together in one hand so they would become one single stick.** The first stick represented the kingdom of Judah, and the second stick represented the kingdom of Israel. 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: Apart from Jesus, we are like the dry bones Ezekiel saw. 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.

Bible Storytelling Tips

- **Make eye contact:** As you tell the story, make eye contact with kids to draw them in.
- **Pause for effect:** Grab listeners' attention by pausing strategically between each section of God's words.

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INTRODUCE the Story

SESSION TITLE: Ezekiel Gave Hope

BIBLE PASSAGE: Ezekiel 37

STORY POINT: God planned to bring His people home and give them new life.

KEY PASSAGE: 2 Chronicles 7:14

BIG PICTURE QUESTION: How did God plan to fix what sin broke? Before He created the world, God planned to send the Messiah to save sinners.

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. Prompt kids to share if they (or a family member) has ever broken a bone. How long did it take to heal?

Activity page (5 minutes)

- "Big Picture Bones" activity page, 1 per kid
- pencils or markers

Invite kids to complete "Big Picture Bones" on the activity page. Guide kids to match the bones to answer the big picture question.

SAY • In the Bible story we will hear today, God gave a vision to a prophet named Ezekiel. He told Ezekiel about His plan to fix what sin broke. Let's find out more.

LOW PREP

- masking tape, 2 rolls
- index cards
- markers
- large roll of paper (optional)

Session starter (10 minutes)

OPTION 1: Bone labeling

Before the session, write the following words on separate index cards. Prepare two sets: *clavicle, cranium, femur, humerus, mandible, patella, phalanges, radius, ribs, tibia*.

Form two teams of kids: boys and girls. Instruct each

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team to choose a player to be the human model. (Option: Draw a body outline on a large sheet of paper and let kids label the outline.) Give each team a roll of masking tape and a set of index cards. Challenge kids to label their human model by taping the names of bones to the areas of the body they think the bones can be found.

After a few minutes, compare the teams' labels and reveal the correct answers.

SAY • The average adult skeleton is made up of 206 bones. Did you know that most of those bones are in the hands and feet? (54 bones in the hands, 52 in the feet) Today's Bible story is about a valley of bones!

Answers:
- clavicle: collarbone
- cranium: skull
- femur: thighbone
- humerus: upper arm bone
- mandible: jawbone
- patella: kneecap
- phalanges: finger or toe bones
- radius: forearm bone
- ribs: bones around the chest
- tibia: lower leg bone

OPTION 2: Escaping air challenge

Form two teams of kids. For each team, line up 12 cups along the edge of a table. Give a balloon to one player from each team. When you say go, the player should blow up his balloon and then hold the open end toward the cups, using the escaping air to knock over the cups. He should inflate the balloon again to knock over more cups.

- plastic cups
- balloons
- stopwatch or timer
- Allergy Alert download

A player who knocks over all of the team's cups in 60 seconds earns a point for his team. Reset the cups and play additional rounds with new players and new balloons.

SAY • You worked hard to put your breath into those balloons and knock over the cups! In the Bible story we will hear today, the prophet Ezekiel said to some dry bones, "I will put breath in you so that you will come to life." Can dry bones come to life? We'll soon find out!

Transition to teach the story

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TEACH the Story

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Countdown

- countdown video

Show the countdown video as you transition to teach the story. Set it to end as the session begins.

Introduce the session (3 minutes)

- leader attire
- shoulder bag
- large box
- Bible

[Leader enters wearing dark pants, a light blue shirt, and a hat. He or she is carrying a large box and a bag across the shoulder that contains a Bible.]

LEADER • Hello, everyone! Beautiful day today, isn't it? I'm [*your name*] … the newest official mail carrier in [*your city*]! Wow, it feels so great to have completed all the weeks of training and finally have a route of my own. You know, the mail system has changed a lot over the years but I think the future is bright! [*Hold up the box.*] Online shopping is thriving, and someone has to deliver all those packages. Who knew so many people prefer shopping from their couch in their pajamas?

[*Set down the box and retrieve the Bible.*] Well, I want to share one more Bible story with you. I think you'll really like it.

Tip: If you prefer not to use themed content or characters, adapt or omit this introduction.

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Big picture question (1 minute)

LEADER • Can anyone say our big picture question and answer? [*Choose a volunteer to respond.*] That's great! Let's say it all together. ***How did God plan to fix what sin broke? Before He created the world, God planned to send the Messiah to save sinners.*** Keep the bigger picture of the Bible in mind as you hear the story today.

Giant timeline (1 minute)

Show the giant timeline. Point to individual Bible stories as you review.

- Giant Timeline

LEADER • The nation of Israel has quite the history. After God rescued the Israelites from Egypt and made a covenant with them—choosing them to be His own special people—the people failed to obey God. As the people moved farther away from God, God sent prophets to show them more of His plan to rescue them from sin. The prophets called the people to turn back to God and ask Him for forgiveness.

However, God's people did not listen to the prophets, and they continued to disobey. Even so, God did not stop showing mercy and grace. He gave them more opportunities to repent of their sin.

When the people refused to turn back to God, God disciplined His people by sending them into foreign lands as captives. The Israelites were overtaken by Assyria, and as we saw last time, Judah was taken captive by Babylon. But even there, God continued to remind His people that a day would come when He would make a new covenant with them through Jesus.

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Tell the Bible story (10 minutes)

- Bibles
- "Ezekiel Gave Hope" video
- Big Picture Question Poster
- Bible Story Picture Poster
- Story Point Poster

Open your Bible to Ezekiel 37. Use the Bible storytelling tips on the Bible story page to help you tell the story, or show the Bible story video "Ezekiel Gave Hope."

LEADER • Ezekiel was living with God's people in Judah when the Babylonians invaded and took Judah captive. Ezekiel and other survivors were moved to Babylon. The Babylonian invasion happened just like God said it would. God is faithful; He always keeps His promises.

Ezekiel was in Babylon when he saw a vision from God. Ezekiel saw a valley of dry bones. As Ezekiel spoke God's words to the bones, he saw the bones come to life. 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 home and give them new life.**

Christ connection

Tip: Use Scripture and the guide provided on page 213 to explain how to become a Christian. Make sure kids know when and where they can ask questions.

LEADER • ***How did God plan to fix what sin broke? Before He created the world, God planned to send the Messiah to save sinners.*** 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.

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Questions from kids video (3 minutes)

Show the "Unit 15, Session 6" questions from kids video. Prompt kids to think about how a person can know if he or she is a Christian. Guide them to discuss ways God changes sinners who trust in Him.

- "Unit 15, Session 6" questions from kids video

Missions moment (3 minutes)

Ask kids to describe how people or teams become champions.

- "10:12 Sports (Part 3)" missions video

LEADER • We've been learning about a football team in Baltimore, the 10:12 Sports Eagles, who are coached by men who want to share their faith on and off the field. The Eagles made it to the final game—the championship game!

Did they become the league champions? Let's watch and find out.

Show the "10:12 Sports (Part 3)" missions video. Then briefly discuss what it means to be a champion on and off the field. Emphasize that the 10:12 Sports coaches want their players to be champions for Christ. Jesus gives believers new life in Him.

Key passage (5 minutes)

Show the key passage poster. Lead the boys and girls to read together 2 Chronicles 7:14.

- Key Passage Poster
- "I Will Hear" song

LEADER • God wants to be in a relationship with us. He wants us to turn from our sin and find true life in Him. Life with God brings forgiveness and healing. Let's sing our key passage song to remember these true words.

Lead boys and girls in singing "I Will Hear."

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Sing (4 minutes)

- "Once and For All" song

Open your Bible and read aloud John 5:24.

LEADER • We heard in today's story that **God planned to bring His people home and give them new life.** Apart from Jesus, we are like the dry bones Ezekiel saw. We are spiritually dead, unable to know and love God.

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. Let's sing!

Sing together "Once and For All."

Pray (2 minutes)

Invite kids to pray before dismissing to apply the story.

LEADER • Lord, even when Your people were far from home in the land of Babylon, You were with them. You gave them hope through Your prophets. God, make us aware of Your presence. We look forward to one day being home with You forever. Amen.

Dismiss to apply the story

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

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APPLY the Story

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KEY PASSAGE: 2 Chronicles 7:14

BIG PICTURE QUESTION: How did God plan to fix what sin broke? Before He created the world, God planned to send the Messiah to save sinners.

Key passage activity (5 minutes)

- Key Passage Poster
- sticky notes
- marker

Before the session, write words and phrases of the key passage on separate sticky notes. Display the key passage poster and lead kids to read the verse aloud. Then mix up the notes and challenge kids to put them in order. When kids finish, allow volunteers who have memorized the key passage to recite it from memory.

SAY • God's heart is for His people. God planned to bring His people home and give them new life. When we turn from our sin and trust in Jesus, God will give us a home with Him and life forever.

Discussion & Bible skills (10 minutes)

- Bibles, 1 per kid
- Story Point Poster
- "Kings of Israel and Judah" printable
- tape

Distribute Bibles. Guide boys and girls to open their Bibles to Ezekiel 37. Direct kids' attention to the lists of kings from the "Kings of Israel and Judah" printable. Ask kids which kingdom Ezekiel prophesied to. (*Judah*)

Remind kids that the Babylonians overtook Judah. Ezekiel was taken captive with God's people, and he prophesied while he was in Babylon. Tape the Ezekiel name tag next to the list of Judah's kings.

SAY • Because of his vision from God, Ezekiel gave hope

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to God's people in Babylon. God hadn't abandoned them. In fact, **God planned to bring His people home and give them new life.**

Choose a volunteer to read aloud Ezekiel 37:11-14. Ask the following questions. Lead the group to discuss:

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

1. How do you think God's people felt when they were taken to Babylon? *Invite kids to share how God's people—taken far from their homes—probably felt scared, sorry, or alone. Emphasize God's grace in giving His people a message of hope through Ezekiel.* (Option: Choose a volunteer to read Ps. 31:23-24.)
2. How does this story change how you think about God's discipline of His people? *Remind kids that even though discipline is hard, God uses discipline to teach us and change us. God does not abandon His people. He is with us and does everything for His glory and our good.* (Option: Choose a volunteer to read Ps. 94:12-14.)
3. What does it mean to be "dead in sin"? How can people dead in sin come to life? *Guide kids to discuss how sin separates people from God. Life comes from hearing and believing the Word of God, which tells us the good news that Jesus died for our sins.* (Option: Choose a volunteer to read Rom. 10:17.)

Activity choice (10 minutes)

OPTION 1: Giving together

- bowl of coins
- calculator (optional)

SAY • Giving offerings to help support missionaries is an important part of what we do in our churches. One dollar might not make a big difference, but when everyone gives a dollar, or even more, it makes a big difference. Our offerings help people have a new life with Jesus.

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Tip: Use this activity option to reinforce the missions moment from Teach the Story.

Take time to reference your missions offerings at church or missions project that your kids might be familiar with. Pass around a bowl of coins and ask each kid to take a coin (or a few coins, depending on the size of your group).

Ask one volunteer to bring his coin(s) to the front. Count the money, and then ask a few more kids to bring their money. Continue until every kid has included an offering. Share how much the coins are worth together.

SAY • When we give together, like giving our offerings at church, we can do more to help support missionaries.

Encourage kids to prayerfully consider supporting the work of missions by giving money, praying for missionaries, or getting involved in local missions projects.

LOW PREP

- pencils

OPTION 2: Noisy orchestra

Explain to the group that they are now an orchestra. Assign each kid one of three sounds: pat legs, click (tap pencils together), blow.

Instruct the "leg patters" to sit at one side of the room, the "clickers" to sit in the center, and the "blowers" to sit to the other side. Then demonstrate hand motions you will make. Begin with your hands together near your waist. That means kids should make their noises quietly.

As you raise your hands up and apart, kids should increase their volume. Bring your hands back down and together to quiet the noise. Raise them up again before holding your hands in fists to signal kids to stop the noise.

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

SAY • God showed Ezekiel a vision to communicate how **God planned to bring His people home and give them new life.** God told Ezekiel to speak to the bones. At first, Ezekiel heard a rattling sound as the

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bones in the valley came together. [*Conduct the "knee patters" to pat quietly.*]

Then God sent breath into the bones. [*Conduct the "blowers" to blow gently.*] The breath entered the bones, and they came to life.

Ezekiel also had a vision of two sticks coming together. [*Conduct the "clickers" to tap their pencils quietly. Finally, conduct everyone to increase in volume and then make fists to end the noise.*]

When we are dead in our sin, God has the power to give us life. This is good news we can share with everyone we meet.

Journal and prayer (5 minutes)

- pencils
- Journal Page
- "Ezekiel's Message" activity page, 1 per kid

Distribute journal pages and pencils. Guide kids to think about and answer the questions listed on the page:

- What does this story teach me about God or the gospel?
- What does the story teach me about myself?
- Are there any commands in this story to obey? How are they for God's glory and my good?
- Are there any promises in this story to remember? How do they help me trust and love God?
- How does this story help me to live on mission better?

As kids journal, invite them to share their ideas. Then pray, thanking God for the hope we have in Jesus. Acknowledge that He alone is our source of true life.

As time allows, lead kids to complete "Ezekiel's Message" on the activity page. Kids should use the coordinates to figure out Ezekiel's message to God's people in Babylon.

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

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