



WINTER 07

JANUARY 18, 2026

LESSON TEXT

Ezekiel 36:37

FOCUS VERSES

Ezekiel 36:26-27

²⁶A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh.

²⁷And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them.

TRUTH ABOUT COVENANT

God is faithful to restore hardened hearts.

The Prophet Ezekiel

I WILL
YIELD
TO GOD'S SPIRIT IN
ORDER TO REMAIN
SENSITIVE
TO HIM.

COVENANT CONTEXT

As we begin a study of Ezekiel, we move into the section of the Old Testament (Major and Minor Prophets) that records how God spoke to Israel to call them back to covenant. After being exiled to Babylon, Ezekiel prophesied to the Jews of their need to repent and renew their covenant with God. Although they were hundreds of miles away from their land and the Temple, God made a covenantal promise through Ezekiel that He would pour out His Spirit and everyone—not just those in Judea—would have access to His glory.

SG **TEACHING OUTLINE**

Icebreaker: What is a common saying you don't understand or agree with?

Teacher Tip: Connect the group's answers to a saying the people of Israel used to quote which grieved God (such as, "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge").

Lesson Connection: Share the Lesson Connection.

I. A PEOPLE IN EXILE

A. God Judged Wayward Judah

DISCUSS: *What are some of the drawbacks to our ability to travel to so many places so easily? How does that contribute to people's sense of "lostness" in our world?*

B. The Exiles' Hardened Hearts **I**

C. I will take responsibility to obey God's commands.

DISCUSS: *Why do we find it easier to blame others than to take responsibility for our own actions?*

II. A PROPHET IN EXILE

A. God's Glory

DISCUSS: *Where is the most unlikely place you have experienced the glory of God? What did that teach you about God's sovereignty?*

B. The People's Defilement

C. I will live my life in a way that brings honor to God's name. **V**

DISCUSS: *What can we do this week to glorify and honor God among our world?*

III. A PEOPLE RESTORED

A. The Promise of a New Heart

B. Restored Only by the Power of the Spirit

DISCUSS: *Since the outpouring of God's Spirit at Pentecost, individual believers have become the temple where God's presence resides. What are the greatest benefits of God's presence in your life?*

C. I will yield to God's Spirit in order to remain sensitive to Him.

Internalizing the Message

PRAYER FOCUS

Lead the group in prayer and consider the following topics of focus:

- For God to help us see areas where we have grown spiritually lazy
- For God to transform our hearts with the proper motivations for serving Him

LESSON CONNECTION

During the height of World War II, Donald L. Miller was commissioned to fly a bombing raid over Germany. The American airman took flight and was well on his way when his plane was shot down and he was captured by the Nazis. Miller was sent to a notorious prison camp where his captors harshly treated and constantly watched him.

Life in the camp was extremely difficult. He and his fellow prisoners of war were fed little, faced freezing winters, and could get little to no privacy. Even though they were miserable, they worked hard to keep each other's spirits up. They created a secret network of resistance, including plans to escape, and ways to entertain themselves like theater and classes.

Months into his captivity, Donald Miller finally received a letter from his wife, Eleanor, from their home in Ohio. It had taken weeks to arrive and the Germans severely censored her letter. They blacked out several sentences before delivering it to her husband, their prisoner. Even still, her letter brought something Miller desperately needed: something to live for so far away from home.

He carefully, slowly read every word. Eleanor wrote how the seasons were changing and how their garden was growing. She told him how much she missed him. And she added a coded message, something she knew her husband would understand but the Germans would likely not. She wrote, "Our little fighter is practicing her parachute jumps around the house!" It was her way of telling him that their two-year-old daughter, whom he hadn't seen since she was a baby, was healthy and active. He closed his eyes and pictured what his two-year-old daughter looked like now. He pictured her jumping off chairs, pretending to parachute like her father. It filled him with a mixture of joy and sharp homesickness.

That letter fueled Miller with a will to survive, even in barely livable conditions. He carefully folded the letter, kept it in his pocket, and reread it time and time again. He shared the story of his daughter with his fellow POWs, and it too became a story of hope for many of them—a reminder of the world waiting beyond the barbed wire. When the war finally ended two years later, Miller was set free and returned home where he was reunited with Eleanor and his now four-year-old daughter.

Judah's prophet Ezekiel was on a mission to bring the Jews back to God, but Ezekiel was captured along with his fellow Hebrews. They were taken as prisoners of war to Babylon where God gave Ezekiel a vision of the heavenly throne room: a world beyond the "barbed wire." It was his lifeline during his captivity, and he promised God had something much better than what they were experiencing. In his heart, Ezekiel held hope that God would one day set them free and bring them back where he longed to be: God was going to bring His people home.

BIBLE LESSON

I. A PEOPLE IN EXILE

A. God Judged Wayward Judah

It is difficult for contemporary Westerners to imagine the traumatic reality of Judah's Exile in Babylon. In an era when world travel has become commonplace, it is difficult for us to imagine a world like the ancient Near East where leaving one's country was considered not only dangerous (everywhere outside one's homeland was enemy territory) but also its own kind of shameful disloyalty to one's family and especially one's god.

That is why we are supposed to be shocked by Abram's willingness to leave his country, his kindred, and his father's house in Genesis 12:1. In that era, when all aspects of one's identity (ethnicity, culture, and religion) were rooted in the people's birthplace, it makes sense that the ultimate curse for breaking God's covenant was exile from their promised homeland: "And it shall come to pass, that as the LORD rejoiced over you to do you good, and to multiply you; so the LORD will rejoice over you to destroy you, and to bring you to nought; and ye shall be plucked from off the land whither thou goest to possess it. And the LORD shall scatter thee among all people, from the one end of the earth even unto the other" (Deuteronomy 28:63-64).

DISCUSS: *What are some of the drawbacks to our ability to travel to so many places so easily? How does that contribute to people's sense of "lostness" in our world?*

B. The Exiles' Hardened Hearts

In Deuteronomy 28:63 the loss of the land symbolized a loss of relationship with the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The exiles of Ezekiel's day refused to accept this reality. Even more importantly, they refused to accept that their captivity was the result of their own sins. In Ezekiel 18, the prophet responded to a common saying used as a sound-bite explanation of the current crisis: "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge" (Ezekiel 18:2). Mistakenly, these exiles were charging God with unjustly judging them for previous generations breaking God's covenant.

However, God moved them over five hundred miles from their homeland to Babylon to judge them for how their own sins had broken their covenant with God. As shown from their earliest days inhabiting the land, Israel's history was marked by a continual pattern of sin and rebellion against the Lord. (See Judges 2:12-19.) The judgment of the Babylonian Exile did speak to the sins of the previous generation, but the current generation was also guilty. Their hard-heartedness is what spurred God to send Ezekiel to confront them with his unusual methods. If the people would not *listen* to the Word of God, then God would *show* it to them.

C. I will take responsibility to obey God's commands.

Yet there was hope for these ancient exiles, and there is hope for us today. The same principle that holds us morally responsible for our sinful actions also allows us to

confess and repent. Immediately after this seeming pronouncement of doom, God said: “But if a man be just, and do that which is lawful and right . . . he is just, he shall surely live, saith the Lord God” (Ezekiel 18:5, 9). The ultimate lesson is not that we are doomed to judgment but that we are called to repent. We are called to own up to our wrongdoings, shortcomings, and blatant rebellions, and then to choose to walk a different path by the power of God. And it is a choice anyone can make.

DISCUSS: *Why do we find it easier to blame others than to take responsibility for our own actions?*

II. A PROPHET IN EXILE

A. God’s Glory

Before God called Ezekiel to be a prophet, he was already destined to be a priest at the Temple in Jerusalem. In fact, these two vocations were inextricably linked from the outset. Ezekiel was called as a prophet in his “thirtieth year” (Ezekiel 1:1), which is the age at which a priest was required to assume his duties (Numbers 4:3).

As a priest of the Jerusalem Temple, Ezekiel would have focused on maintaining the glory of God dwelling in the Temple. (See Isaiah 6.) God’s glory was the visible sign of His presence, described throughout the Old Testament as a cloud that settled first on Mount Sinai, then the wilderness Tabernacle, and finally Solomon’s Temple. Its presence signified the covenant between God and Israel, their mutual belonging that gave Israel her unique identity among the nations.

Imagine Ezekiel’s surprise when the great cloud of God’s glory appeared on the banks of a canal in Babylon. No longer confined to the sacred precincts of the Temple, God was demonstrating His sovereignty over all nations, literally invading the territory of the Babylonian high god, Marduk. So great was God’s desire to be with His people in covenant relationship, He had come to dwell with His (rebellious) people while they were in exile—while they were without the Temple.

DISCUSS: *Where is the most unlikely place you have experienced the glory of God? What did that teach you about God’s sovereignty?*

B. The People’s Defilement

After Ezekiel’s stunning vision of the heavenly throne room in his first chapter, Ezekiel 10 sadly demonstrates the departure of God’s glory from the Jerusalem Temple, symbolizing the certainty of Judah’s defeat, Jerusalem’s conquest, and the Temple’s complete destruction. The cause? Solomon’s Temple had become so defiled by the people’s idolatrous worship that God could no longer stand to remain in His own house. God’s people should have been holy, but their idolatry was so pervasive that the priests themselves were worshiping idols in the very precincts of the Temple.

Later, in Ezekiel 16, Ezekiel went on to describe Israel’s unfaithfulness in graphic and shocking terms. Rather than repent of their sins and trust in their covenant God, Judah formed expensive alliances with other nations for protection. On the surface those

alliances appeared to be the smart move, but they only proved how little they valued God. They had run a long way in the wrong way away from the Lord.

C. I will live my life in a way that brings honor to God's name.

We can learn much from the nation of Judah. We should do all we do for the honor of God's name, and that is more than just a divine ego trip where God could not abide being cast in a negative light. The proclamation of His name among the nations was the revelation to the world of His glorious power, grace, and forgiveness. It was the catalyst that should have drawn the nations away from their false gods to worship the one, true, living God of Israel.

God has always called His people to live a life separated from the ungodly ways of the world. It is a key way we are called to proclaim the uniqueness of our God. But what happens when the people who wear His name—who claim to follow this God who is so utterly unique among the many “gods” our world is worshiping—live a life no longer distinguishable from that of their neighbors? God's name, which should be glorified, is instead profaned and dishonored. Let us live to honor and glorify God's name and help draw people looking for Him closer to Him. (V)

DISCUSS: *What can we do this week to glorify and honor God among our world?*

III. A PEOPLE RESTORED

A. The Promise of a New Heart

Ezekiel knew Judah's transformation would take more than just renewed determination to “do better next time.” The people were so steeped in idolatry, living in blatant rebellion to God's Word, no simple reformation was possible. They needed a spiritual transformation. Little did Ezekiel know at the time, but his vision of God's glory as he stood by the Canal Chebar provided an important clue to God's solution to this perplexing problem. As God of all the earth (not just of the Promised Land), God could not be contained in any earthly Temple.

God revealed through Ezekiel that He never intended to dwell in a single Tabernacle or Temple. God wanted to deal with sin on an individual level; God wanted to indwell each individual through His Spirit. God's solution is found in Ezekiel 36:26-27: “A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them.”

B. Restored Only by the Power of the Spirit

Remember, God gave that promise to Ezekiel while he was in exile. God was promising a better, brighter day than the dark day Ezekiel was living. This stunning prophecy weaves together and radically transforms Ezekiel's other themes. Because God's Spirit would dwell *within* His people, that awe-inspiring glory of God seen in the opening

vision would be available to every Judean, no matter where they were. Although they would rebuild the Temple the Babylonians destroyed, one day a physical temple would no longer be required to provide access to God. As a result, the spiritual power needed for transformation was immediately and constantly available for those who would choose to rely on it. Finally, a people who had been completely transformed by the empowering presence of God would, by virtue of that reality in their lives, be effective witnesses for the glory of God's great name among the nations.

This transformation only happens through the indwelling of the Spirit. Without it, the gospel becomes nothing more than a call to try harder to be a better person. This is why Jesus told Nicodemus that the new birth required being "born of water and of the Spirit" (John 3:5; see also Acts 2:38). The gift of the Holy Ghost is not an optional upgrade to the plan of salvation; it is, as the prophet Ezekiel foresaw, its crucial completion.

DISCUSS: *Since the outpouring of God's Spirit at Pentecost, individual believers have become the temple where God's presence resides. What are the greatest benefits of God's presence in your life?*

C. I will yield to God's Spirit in order to remain sensitive to Him.

The gift of God's Spirit is the answer to the "stony heart" that eventually doomed the Jews of Ezekiel's day. It is impossible to live for God successfully without the Spirit's indwelling presence. But God's Spirit must be more than just our way to Heaven; we must live led by God's Spirit. Paul wrote: "Yield yourselves unto God" (Romans 6:13) and "quench not the Spirit" (1 Thessalonians 5:19). These admonitions make it clear that we can disobey the Spirit's convicting power with disastrous consequences. Maturing in our covenant with Jesus Christ is depicted as learning to walk in and be led of the Spirit instead of by our flesh (human nature). That means the more we yield ourselves to God, the power of His Spirit increases as the power of our own sinful habits and worldly ways of thinking decreases. Through the Spirit, we can live victoriously over sin's power.



Teacher Option: Tell the story below or share one of your own to illustrate how we should be more motivated by a desire to know and glorify God than by any other external reasons.

INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

“**E**very year, about 1,300 young men and women enter the U.S. Military Academy in West Point, New York. Only about 1,000 of them graduate. Of those graduates, a smaller portion pursue military careers beyond the mandatory five years of service. And fewer still are selected for early promotion” (science.org, “One Type of Motivation May Be Key to Success”). To understand the reasons behind these varied levels of success, two psychologists looked at fourteen years of data from over ten thousand incoming cadets.

The West Point application contains a series of scaled questions asking students why they are applying. Applicants must rate their desire on a scale between “Desire to be an Army officer” and “My parents wanted me to go.” The first is an internal motivator, focused on the value of the goal itself; the second is clearly external, focusing on some other benefit of achieving their goal. The two psychologists were interested in discovering whether internal or external motivations were greater predictors of overall long-term success.

The findings, reported in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, were clear and not totally surprising: “Cadets with primarily internal motives were about 20% more likely to make it through West Point than the average. For cadets who did not have primarily internal motivations—even if they were equally driven by internal motives and external motives . . . —their chances of graduation

were worse than average” (science.org). The findings help to confirm a long-held suspicion that internal forms of motivation are more important to the achievement of long-term goals. In other words, in the long run, success comes to those who desire the achievement themselves, not to those who are compelled by others to pursue it.

Ezekiel lived in a time when Judah lost all sense of internal motivation to serve the Lord. Instead, she had chosen to follow the spiritually destructive path of least resistance. Judah had turned a blind eye to the destruction that had befallen the larger northern kingdom of Israel just over a century earlier, merrily continuing down the same path of idolatry and faithlessness. Clearly, nothing would turn Judah from her destructive path unless she wanted to leave it—no warning stern enough, no threat drastic enough to turn her away.

But there was still hope because Judah’s God specializes in transforming stony, unresponsive hearts into sensitive, fleshly hearts. And He is the same God today, specializing in transforming not just who we are but who we want to be. God does not just take away our sin, but He replaces our craving for sin with a desire to live for the glory of God. To all those struggling with spiritual laziness, with a lack of proper motivation to pursue God’s plan and purpose in your life, let God do some “heart surgery” today. Although we will not be fully sinless this side of Heaven, each day we can grow closer to God.