

OLD TESTAMENT GOSPEL DOCTRINE CLASS

Green Mountain 1st Ward, Lakewood, Colorado

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Page 1

Lesson 43: The Shepherds of Israel (Ezekiel 18; 34; 37)

Introduction



How is a shepherd different from a sheepherder? That question is answered by **President Ezra Taft Benson**: “*In Jesus’ time, the Palestinian shepherd was noted for his protection of his sheep. Unlike modern sheepherders, the shepherd always walked ahead of his flock. He led them. The shepherd knew each of the sheep and usually had a name for each. The sheep knew his voice and trusted him and would not follow a stranger. Thus, when called, the sheep would come to him.* (See John

10:14, John 10:16.) At night shepherds would bring their sheep to a corral called a sheepfold. High walls surrounded the sheepfold, and thorns were placed on top of these walls to prevent wild animals and thieves from climbing over. Sometimes, however, a wild animal driven by hunger would leap over the walls into the midst of the sheep, frightening them. Such a situation separated the true shepherd—one who loved his sheep—from the hireling—one who worked only for pay and duty. The true shepherd was willing to give his life for the sheep. He would go in amongst the sheep and fight for their welfare. The hireling, on the other hand, valued his own personal safety above the sheep and would usually flee from the danger” (Ensign, May 1983, 43).

The shepherd walks ahead of the sheep and leads them; the quotation implies that the sheepherder walks behind the sheep and drives them. Part of this lesson discusses our responsibilities as spiritual shepherds.

Background: In 597 B.C., King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon carried into captivity many people from the kingdom of Judah. Among these captives was Ezekiel, whom the Lord called as a prophet five years later. In 587 B.C. the Babylonians destroyed

Jerusalem and took many more captives. Ezekiel ministered to his exiled people until 570 B.C. Ezekiel’s writings include stern rebukes and glorious promises that apply to the ancient kingdom of Judah, all Israel, and Church members today.

Although Jerusalem had been destroyed, Ezekiel foresaw a day when Israel would be gathered and restored. This event is symbolized in his vision of the valley of dry bones and his prophecy about the sticks of Judah and Joseph.

The shepherds of Israel

In Ezekiel 34 the Lord reproved the self-serving shepherds of Israel who had not fed the flock. He then described himself as the Good Shepherd who would gather

his flock in the latter days and lead them during the Millennium. The “shepherds of Israel” spoken of in Ezekiel 34 are the religious leaders of Ezekiel’s day.

Ezekiel 34:2-6 - The Lord was displeased with the religious leaders who cared for their own needs while neglecting the sheep who then were scattered and became

Lesson Highlights

- The shepherds of Israel
- Repentance and forgiveness
- Ezekiel’s vision of the valley of bones
- The stick of Judah and the stick of Joseph

A study of this lesson will help us to fulfill our responsibilities as “shepherds of Israel” (Ezekiel 34:2).

Next Week

#44 “Every Thing Shall Live Whither the River Cometh” (Ezekiel 43–44; 47)

Ezekiel's teachings help us understand how much the Savior loves and cares for each of us. He is our Shepherd. He is eager to forgive. He made it possible for us to be resurrected. He is directing the latter-day gathering of Israel. And he brought forth the Book of Mormon as another witness of him.



Ezekiel 37: 16-17 Joining the Two Sticks

Gospel Doctrine Notebook

Record your thoughts on the teachings discussed in this lesson.

- Why is it important to understand that repentance includes both turning away from sin and having a change of heart? How have you experienced this change of heart?
- Why is it important to know that the Lord is just and merciful?
- How has the Book of Mormon helped you better understand the Bible? How has it reinforced for you the Bible's witness of the Lord Jesus Christ?

the prey of predatory beasts.

Each of us can be considered a shepherd of Israel because we are to watch over and strengthen each other as family members, Church members, neighbors, home and visiting teachers, and members of quorums and classes. **Elder Bruce R. McConkie** said: "*Anyone serving in any capacity in the*

Church in which he is responsible for the spiritual or temporal well-being of any of the Lord's children is a shepherd to those sheep. The Lord holds his shepherds accountable for the safety (salvation) of his sheep" (Mormon Doctrine, 2nd ed. [1966], 710).

Ezekiel 34:11-16 - True shepherds search for, seek out, deliver from, gather, feed, bind up, and strength-

Repentance and forgiveness

Ezekiel 18:21-22, 27-28 - Repentance and forgiveness are available if we turn from our sins.

Ezekiel 18:31 - When we truly repent we "make ... a new heart and a new spirit". It is important to understand that repentance includes both turning away from sin and

having a complete change of heart.

Ezekiel 18:24, 26 - People who turn away from righteousness and do not repent will die unforgiven.

Ezekiel 18:23, 32. - When he punishes the wicked, the Lord takes no pleasure in it.

Ezekiel's vision of the valley of bones

Ezekiel's vision of the valley of bones symbolizes both the Resurrection and the restoration of the children of Israel to their promised land.

Ezekiel 37:1-14 - The Resurrection was symbolized in Ezekiel's vision as the bones came together, were covered with flesh and skin, and were given life. The restoration of

the children of Israel to their promised land is symbolized in Ezekiel's vision as the Resurrection is used to symbolize the restoration.

Ezekiel's vision can also be read as an analogy describing the renewal of the "hope" of Israel (Ezekiel 37:11). Although Israel's hope may be as dead as the

en their sheep. President Ezra Taft Benson said: "We call on you to extend yourselves with renewed dedication. ... We want you to watch, to feed, to tend, and to care for the flock and, in the event that some are temporarily lost, we challenge you to find them" (Ensign, May 1983, 45). Of course, the Savior is our example as the Good Shepherd.

Ezekiel 18:25, 29-32 - In the Lord's justice and mercy, all are equally judged on their ways (choices).

"great army" of bones that Ezekiel saw, the Savior can bring it back to vitality and life.

The bones in Ezekiel's vision began to take life after Ezekiel told them to "hear the word of the Lord" (Ezekiel 37:4). The word of the Lord gives us life.

The stick of Judah and the stick of Joseph

Ezekiel's prophecy of the sticks of Judah and Joseph has a dual meaning. It refers to the latter-day combining of the scriptural records of Judah and Joseph (Israel). It also refers to the latter-day reunion of the kingdoms of Judah and Joseph (Israel).

The prophecy in **Ezekiel 37:15-20** has been fulfilled. The word stick in these verses refers to a type of wooden writing tablet commonly used in Ezekiel's day. The stick of Judah symbolizes the Bible, and the stick of Joseph symbolizes the Book of Mormon.

Elder Boyd K. Packer said: "*The stick or record of Ju-*

dah—the Old Testament and the New Testament—and the stick or record of Ephraim—the Book of Mormon, which is another testament of Jesus Christ—are now woven together in such a way that as you pore over one you are drawn to the other; as you learn from one you are enlightened by the other. They are indeed one in our hands. Ezekiel's prophecy now stands fulfilled" (Ensign, Nov. 1982, 53).

Ezekiel said that after the two sticks were put together:

- The children of Israel would be gathered together and united into one

kingdom with the Savior as King (**Ezekiel 37:21-22**).

- The people would be cleansed and purified (**Ezekiel 37:23**).
- The people would observe the Lord's statutes (**Ezekiel 37:24**).
- The people would dwell in a promised land (**Ezekiel 37:25**).

Ezekiel 37:26-28 - Other blessings the Lord promised included one very important blessing—the restoration of the Lord's sanctuary or tabernacle, meaning the temple.