

Old Testament 43
The Shepherds of Israel
(Ezekiel 18; 34; 37)
By Lenet Hadley Read

(This material will: 1. Help overcome fear in trying to understand Ezekiel's imagery. It is not as daunting as one may believe. 2. Point out Ezekiel's signs of the True Church.)

I. Ezekiel's writings contain highly figurative symbolism, common to the cultural heritage of Biblical lands.

A. Wilford Woodruff gave a helpful guide to the interpretation of such symbolism. "... the Lord does communicate some things of importance to the children of men by means of visions and dreams... And what is it all for? **It is to teach us a principle.**" (Wilford Woodruff, *Discourses of Wilford Woodruff*, Selected by Homer Durham, p. 291).

B. **Seeking the principle behind each vision** will help understand Ezekiel.

1. **Joseph Smith's statement that we will not be held accountable about highly symbolic visions until the Lord reveals the meaning is true.** But that does not mean we should not desire to know and that we cannot know. While **not accountable** for not knowing, knowing will bless us!

2. The ancient prophets used imagery to hide truths from unbelievers. But we are believers in the Last Days, **when we can understand**, if we desire.

II. The Vision of the Creatures with Four Faces and the Wheels.

A. This vision given in Chapter One, is the most challenging of Ezekiel's visions. **And yet it is really not that difficult to understand.**

B. Ezekiel saw four creatures, each with faces of a man, a lion, an ox, and an eagle. **These are the symbols of the four tribal groupings of Israel:** Those under Reuben are symbolized by a man; those under Judah by a lion; those under Ephraim by an ox; and those under Dan by an eagle. **Taken altogether in this vision they represent the servants of the Lord in Heaven, who are also a part of Israel.**

C. Modern revelation teaches us the wings and wheels represent "power;" the multiple eyes and images of light signify knowledge (D&C 77:4).

D. But, as explained by President Woodruff, **we err if we do not concentrate on the message.** The real meat of the vision lies in the contrast between what Ezekiel saw in heaven and what he later sees on earth. In heaven he saw, "they [the creatures] went every one straight forward: *whither the spirit was to go, they went; and they turned not when they went...* For the spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels." (Ezekiel 1:12, 21). Twelve references are given in the vision suggesting an *obedient following of the spirit.*

E. After this vision, the Lord says, "I send thee to the children of Israel, to a rebellious nation that hath rebelled against me (Ezekiel 2:3). In fact some concept of rebelliousness is used over twelve times in the Lord's reference to Israel.

Ezekiel, therefore, was shown strong contrast. *While in Heaven there was absolute devotion and obedience among all His servants, with all movements made*

precisely and according to the direction of the spirit, in Israel there was absolute rebelliousness. He was then sent to preach repentance to rebellious Israel!

- F. There is a corollary in what Jesus later taught on earth, in clarity, in the Lord's Prayer. **"Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven."**
- G. Understanding this vision helps us see the Lord would like His servants on earth to be like those in Heaven, to follow His Spirit, without turning.

III. The Vision of the Cherubim and Fiery Coals

- A. Since cherubim guarded the Tree of Life, this vision of one personage clothed in linen obtaining fire from a Heavenly fire **which cherubim guard, bears witness of Jesus the Christ. For only He could pass by.** After obtaining the fire, He scatters it over the city. We know the Savior Himself has passed through fire to purge the faithful, and will later destroy the wicked with fire (Ezekiel Ch. 10:1-7).

IV. Ezekiel's writings contain the same prophecies spoken of by other ancient prophets: of Israel's fall, the inheritance of the gospel by the Gentiles, their later apostasy, and the return of Israel as heirs in the Latter-days. He taught these truths in symbolic imagery.

A. The Parable of the Tree. (Chapter 17)

1. In this parable a great eagle with "many colored" feathers (Christ) takes a top branch of a tree, planting it in the world, and plants some of its seed in a choice land by great waters. In time the planted seed worships another eagle.
2. This is simply a variation of the Book of Mormon's vineyard and Master symbolism, revealing the Lord's dealings with men. He will take off the tall branches (the original tribes of Israel) and scatter them among the world, "into a land of traffick" (v. 3, 4). He will take the seed of His gospel and plant it beside great waters, to grow and spread, but among the Gentiles. For at first the Gospel was spread to many Gentile nations because of the Mediterranean Sea. In time the resulting vine would worship another being (Gentiles' apostasy).
3. The Lord then changes the imagery. He likens Himself to a king who covenanted with this new Gentile Israel but against whom they had rebelled, going back to Egypt for strength (or worldly wisdom). "Therefore... mine oath that he hath despised, and my covenant that he hath broken, even it will I recompense upon his own head... and I will bring him [into the captivity of] Babylon." [The Gentile church will break covenant, become apostate and will become like Babylon, the new apostate power of the world] (v. 19, 20).
4. The Lord's blessings will return to the original branch. "I will also take of the highest branch... and will set it... and **will plant it upon an high mountain and eminent... and it shall bring forth boughs, and bear fruit, and be a goodly cedar: ...** And all the trees of the field shall know that I the Lord have brought down the high tree [ancient Israel], have exalted the low tree [humble Gentiles who accepted the Gospel], have dried up the green tree [the Gentiles become proud, and lose their inheritance due to apostasy], and have made the dry tree to flourish [re-growth of Israel from the strength of its ancient roots] (v. 22, 23, 24).
5. Ezekiel thus adds his witness to these same prophecies.

V. Ezekiel gives major signs of Christ's True Church.

A. *First, they will actively seek after and nurture the lost sheep of His fold* (Ezekiel 34:4-16).

1. While there are very good people in many churches serving as missionaries, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints now has over 88,000 full time missionaries seeking Christ's lost sheep! Furthermore, many of its active members are seeking them among their associates.

2. Once found, His pastors will be good shepherds, and nurture His sheep (Ezekiel 34:23-31).

a. Where do we find a Church who works as diligently to lift up its people spiritually --- to the high moral standards set by Jesus the Christ, and encourages and supports them physically, such as in helping them further their education [as with the Perpetual Education Fund].

b. Church leaders and most active members are either seeking to strengthen youth, strengthening each other and new converts, seeking to reactivate those who have fallen to the wayside, or seeking after the deceased who died without hearing the Gospel.

c. Truly there is no church making such a massive, church-wide, world-wide effort to find and to nurture Christ's sheep.

d. *While we are often condemned for thinking our works will save us, the point is missed that our works are really being done to save others!*

VI. *Second, there will be a uniting of two scriptural records, which bring about the arising of Israel in the Latter-days.* [Ezekiel's Visions of the Dry Bones and of the Two Sticks shows the uniting of the Bible and the Book of Mormon will be the work which will cause Israel to re-arise]. [Ezekiel 37].

A. His vision of the Valley of Dry Bones and of the Two Sticks are related.

B. His Vision of the Dry Bones does foretell the resurrection [for without that, all is lost], and of the return of the Jews to the land of Israel.

C. *But it also foretells that the ten tribes, who have been previously removed from Israel and are functionally dead as to a people, or non-existent, will re-arise.*

1. "Son of man, *these bones are the whole house of Israel*: behold, they say, Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost; we are cut off for our parts (Ezekiel 37:11)." [Note his vision relates to the whole house of Israel].

D. And immediately after this vision, Ezekiel relates the Vision of the Two Sticks. (Ezekiel 37:15-28).

1. In it God says, "I will take the children of Israel from among the heathen, whither they be gone, and will gather them on every side, and bring them into their own land" (Ezekiel 37:21).

2. The two united records will bring about a cleansing, due to the truths that are now clearly understood. For the Book of Mormon will help people understand the Bible. "Neither shall they defile themselves any more with their idols, nor with their detestable things, nor with any of their transgressions: but.... I will cleanse them (Ezekiel 37:23)."

E. This vision finally testifies that it will be because of the uniting of the Bible and the Book of Mormon that Israel will arise, and that eventually both parts of Israel will be united into One People, under the leadership of Jesus the Christ.

1. “And David my servant shall be over them and they all shall have one shepherd; they shall also walk in my judgments, and observe my statutes, and do them (Ezekiel 37:24).”

VII. Ezekiel’s visions repeat prophecies made by other prophets concerning the four step future: Israel will lose God’s covenants; Gentiles will inherit them; Gentiles will fall into apostasy; Israel will re-inherit them in the Last Days. **But Ezekiel adds the powerful truth that it will be because of a record, coming from descendants of Joseph [The Book of Mormon], and its uniting with the testimonies from Judah’s seed [The Bible], that will cause the final great step in the Latter-days --- preparing a United People to be ruled over by their King, Jesus the Christ, during the Millennium.**