

AN EVALUATION OF MORMON TEACHING ON EZEKIEL 37

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Several years ago, a middle aged man who identified himself as a Mormon started attending a night class at the Florida School of Preaching that this writer taught on the Book of Matthew. He came about the tenth week (out of a sixteen week semester) as the result of some full-time students who came upon him as they went door to door, evangelizing their neighborhood. One night after class, he said that the word translated “stick” in Ezekiel 37:16-19 rhymed with a Chinese word that meant “scroll;” therefore, the prophecy of the two sticks coming together was actually fulfilled in the Bible and the Book of Mormon becoming one. That teaching sounded just as ridiculous then as it does now. This writer has not found that exact Chinese connection documented. However, as will be shown, the interpretations of Ezekiel 37 that can be documented in Mormon sources are not much different (but equally ridiculous) as the Mormon visitor’s just described.

In this chapter, an exegesis of Ezekiel 37 will be given and then a comparison will be made between what documented Mormon sources claim Ezekiel 37 teaches and what the Bible actually teaches. This comparison begins with an analysis of Ezekiel 37 because knowing the truth is more valuable than knowing a particular error. When one knows the truth, he or she can evaluate any error that presents itself by that truth. Jesus said, “And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (Jn. 8:32).

The Apocalyptic Style of Ezekiel 37

The Book of Ezekiel, along with other parts of the Bible, most notably Daniel and Revelation, are written in a style known as apocalyptic. Apocalyptic may be defined as “Jewish or Christian literature written in hard times under oppressive foreign domination in symbolic

language to encourage God's people, showing that God was in charge and that evil would be overthrown" (Hester 2.1.01-2.1.03). To examine this definition in its parts, the following emerges. First, "Jewish or Christian literature" means that apocalyptic was always written. Thus, the term "apocalyptic literature" is redundant. Second, "written in hard times under oppressive foreign domination" shows that apocalyptic was written when God's people were suffering. The Books of Ezekiel, Jeremiah, and Daniel were written under the foreign domination of Babylon. The Book of Revelation was written under Roman rule when oppression was severe. Third, apocalyptic was written "in symbolic language." In fact, the term "apocalyptic" is from a Greek word that literally refers to the "revealing of that which has been hidden or concealed." The term implies that apocalyptic was meant to be understood. The particular way in which this "revealing" occurred was through symbols. Fourth, "to encourage God's people" reveals that apocalyptic was concealed from the outsider in general and from the persecutor in particular. Its main purpose was to give its readers comfort, assurance, and courage. Fifth, apocalyptic showed that since "God was in charge and that evil would be overthrown," His people would eventually be victorious.

In addition to being written, apocalyptic also featured two other characteristics, the knowledge of which helps in understanding it. First, apocalyptic was dualistic. That is, it is characterized by thesis and antithesis. For every evil figure, there is an answer on the side of good. Second, apocalyptic was esoteric, which means it was "only for the initiated." It was written to inform only those to whom it was intended; namely, God's people, not the enemies of God's people. To illustrate: if God's people wrote a declarative document that the civil ruler who was responsible for persecuting them was going to be destroyed, and that document fell into the

hands of loyal civil authorities, those authorities would make sure that those who were even remotely associated with such a document would be killed. However, if God's people wrote a highly symbolic document that spoke, for example, of grotesque beasts rising from the sea, animals with seven eyes, etc., and that document fell into the hands of civil authorities, those authorities would dismiss it as nonthreatening. Thus, apocalyptic employed symbols, figures, allegory, and numerous literary devices. The use of these was not meant to conceal the message from those to whom it was intended. Their use was to make the message vivid and forceful to those intended.

There is a difference between apocalyptic and prophecy (adapted from Hester 2.1.03). First, prophecy was oral and written, but apocalyptic was only written. Second, prophecy used natural symbols, but apocalyptic used arbitrary symbols. Third, apocalyptic was written during hard times for the comfort of God's people, but prophecy was not necessarily written in hard times. Many prophecies were written in times of wealth and prosperity, warning God's people of coming destruction due to indifference (cf. Amos 6:1-14).

The Rebirth of God's People Depicted by the Valley of Dry Bones

In Ezekiel 37:1-4, the rebirth of the nation following the coming captivity was pictured in a vision involving a valley of dry bones that came back to life. Ezekiel was first shown a valley full of dry bones.

The hand of the LORD was upon me, and carried me out in the spirit of the LORD, and set me down in the midst of the valley which was full of bones, ²And caused me to pass by them round about: and, behold, there were very many in the open valley; and, lo, they were very dry. (Ezk. 37:1-2)

“The hand of the LORD” being upon him was Ezekiel's usual way of expressing a visionary

experience (cf. Ezk. 1:3; 8:1). The exact location of the valley is not given, nor even if there were a real geographical valley, though some would suggest it was the same place alluded to earlier in Ezekiel 3:22. As with the vision in Ezekiel 8-11, the prophet is an active participant in this vision. Ezekiel made the following two observations as he walked through the valley: (1) there were very many bones exposed above the surface of the valley's floor; and (2) these bones were "very dry," which indicated that they had been dead for a long, long time.

Then the Lord asked Ezekiel, "Son of man, can these bones live?" (Ezk. 37:3a). At face value, the question would be an obvious, "No way!" It is naturally *impossible* to revive bones that are chalky white, ready to disintegrate into the valley's landscape of dust. However, with God, all things are possible (Matt. 19:26), and Ezekiel answered in such a way as to put it in God's hands. "O Lord GOD, thou knowest" was to acknowledge that only through God's will and power could there be any possibility of those bones coming back to life (Ezk. 37:3 cf. Rev. 7:14)! Ezekiel earlier learned first-hand of human helplessness associated with the death of his wife (cf. Ezk. 24:15-27).

Ezekiel was told to prophecy to the dry bones which he saw (Ezk. 37:4-8). Even though it may have seemed ridiculous from a human standpoint, Ezekiel, like any true servant of God, did as the Lord said—"So I prophesied as I was commanded" (Ezk. 37:7a cf. Jer. 13:5). As he prophesied, the power of God became evident (Ezk. 37:7-8). There was a noise and shaking as the bones came together. The double use of "behold" and "beheld" in these verses demonstrates Ezekiel's amazement at what he was witnessing as the bones came to life (Smith). "Bone to his bone" indicates that each piece of bone found the exact place to its corresponding skeleton.

After God's power brought the many bones together to form their many skeletons,

Ezekiel was told, “Prophesy unto the wind, prophesy, son of man, and say to the wind, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live” (Ezk. 37:9). The word translated “wind” is from the Hebrew word *ruah*, which is the same word used for “spirit,” “Spirit,” and “breath.” The significance of this word renders it worthy of further examination.

The basic meaning of *ruah* is “more or less that of ‘blowing’” (Kamlah 690). In approximately one-third of its occurrences, *ruah* refers to “wind, which being intangible, has God as its immediate cause” (Gen. 8:1; Amos 4:13; Isa. 40:7, “breath . . . bloweth,” ASV; Ps. 104:4, “winds his messengers,” ASV). Used in this way, there are two senses of *ruah*: (1) direction of wind (Ezk. 37:9; 42:16-20, “side,” KJV; “wind,” ASVm); and (2) metaphorically, because of the wind’s short-lived, transitory nature, *ruah* refers to “nothing” or “nothingness” (Eccl. 5:16). The idea behind *ruah* is the extraordinary fact that something as intangible as air, or wind, can move with great power. This extraordinary, unseen power is why *ruah* is appropriately the word often translated “Spirit” in the Old Testament (Gen. 1:2). The Holy Spirit cannot be empirically measured yet is of great awesome power!

Ruah is also translated with a form of “breath,” both of humans brought to life (Ezk. 37:8-10 cf. Gen.2:7) and of animals (Eccl. 3:19, 21). As such, it denotes the “life-force.” It may be the “life-force” of an individual (Judg. 15:19) or the “life-force” of a group (Num. 16:22). This “life-force” is not found in idols (Jer. 10:14), but is found in God (Ps. 33:6) and in the Messiah (Isa. 11:4). God is the giver of this “life-force” to His animate creation (Isa. 42:5). God protects the “life-force” that He gives (Ps. 31:5), but God is free to take it back (Ps. 104:29). Since *ruah* is thus dependent upon God’s creative power in initiating life, “death” can be referred

to as “the release of the spirit to God” (Ps. 146:4; Eccl. 12:7 cf. Eccl. 3:21) (Simpson).

As Ezekiel, therefore, prophesied to the “wind [breath, NKJ; *ruah*],” the “breath came into them [the skeletons], and they lived, and stood up upon their feet, an exceeding great army” (Ezk. 37:8). God’s Spirit gave life to these dried bones, and if He can give life to these dead bones, then surely He can give life to the nation!

The meaning of this vision is beyond speculation. God said, “these bones are the whole house of Israel” (Ezk. 37:11a), which refers to both the Northern and Southern Kingdoms (cf. Ezk. 3:7; 5:4; 12:10; 20:40; 36:10; 37:16; 39:25; 45:6) (Cooper 324). The Lord acknowledged the discouragement of His people when He said, “behold, they say, Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost: we are cut off for our parts” (Ezk. 37:11b). Thus, by the question, “Can these bones live?” (Ezk. 37:3), God was asking, “Can a dead and impotent nation in exile and under the control of a godless nation be resurrected and become a living, thriving kingdom once again?” (Cooper 324). The answer was a resounding, “Yes!”

The Lord described this “rebirth” in terms of a resurrection.

Behold, O my people, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel. ¹³And ye shall know that I am the LORD, when I have opened your graves, O my people, and brought you up out of your graves, ¹⁴And shall put my spirit in you, and ye shall live, and I shall place you in your own land: then shall ye know that I the LORD have spoken it, and performed it, saith the LORD. (Ezk. 37:12b-14)

The imagery of opening “your graves,” causing “you to come up out of your graves,” and bringing “you into the land of Israel” was more literally defined earlier, “For I will take you from among the heathen, and gather you out of all countries, and will bring you into your own land” (Ezk. 36:24). Emphasis here was on the resurrection of the nation from captivity, inheriting once

again the land of promise, which was fulfilled in the return of the remnant (cf. Ezr. 2:70; 3:1; 6:16-17; 8:35).

The Rebirth of God’s People Depicted by Two Sticks Uniting Together as One

In this section, Ezekiel was commanded to perform a symbolic action as he had done in other messages (cf. Ezk. 4:1-16; 24:15-24). This is the last of such “action parables” in the Book of Ezekiel (Smith). Ezekiel was told to “take thee one stick, and write upon it, For Judah, and for the children of Israel his companions: then take another stick, and write upon it, For Joseph, the stick of Ephraim, and for all the house of Israel his companions” (Ezk. 37:16).

Notice that each inscription mentioned the name “Israel,” which indicated that the two kingdoms were “always recognized as an ethnic/theological unity” (Cooper 326). The prophet did not use the name “Israel” for identifying the Northern Kingdom, but instead used “Joseph” and “Ephraim” (cf. Ezk. 37:19).

Ezekiel was then to take the sticks and “join them one to another into one stick; and they shall become one in thine hand” (Ezk. 37:17). This action would prompt the people to ask the prophet what all this meant, which would allow him to deliver the word of the Lord (Ezk. 37:18).

As with the case of the vision of dry bones coming to life, there is no doubt as to what the joining of these two sticks meant. The Lord through Ezekiel said exactly what it meant. The general meaning was that “the old divisions of north and south will be abolished and the nation will be unified in God’s hand” (Taylor 239). That which would be involved to accomplish this was laid out in detail. The “stick of Joseph, which is in the hand of Ephraim, and the tribes of Israel his fellows” represented the Northern Kingdom. Since Jeroboam was an Ephraimite (1 Kgs. 11:26), and since he was the one who initiated the Northern Kingdom by setting up the

distinct system of false worship (1 Kgs. 12:25-33), Ephraim became a fitting designation for the tribes of the Northern Kingdom (cf. Hos. 4:16-17). The “stick of Judah” represented the Southern Kingdom, made up of the Davidic line of kings. Ezekiel was to take these two sticks and hold them in his fist so that they became one stick, representing all of God’s people as a single entity (Ezk. 37:19-20).

God will bring about this unification in several ways, indicated by the “I will” statements throughout Ezekiel 37:21-28. First, God will bring a remnant out of captivity to re-inhabit the promised land (Ezk. 37:21). As Ezekiel was “among the captives by the river of Chebar” (Ezk. 1:1), God’s people from the Northern Kingdom had already been deported to foreign lands over a hundred years earlier (2 Kgs. 15:17-31), and God’s people in the Southern Kingdom were in the very process of being deported (cf. Ezk. 5:1-17). However, after the seventy years of captivity prophesied by Jeremiah (25:11-12; 29:10), God would and did bring back a remnant of each of the twelve tribes (cf. Ezer. 2:70; 3:1; 6:16-17; 8:35).

Second, God will unify His people under “one king” (Ezk. 37:22). “Upon the mountains of Israel” indicates that God’s people would no longer occupy two lands, Samaria and Judah, but would be one unified nation. Note that this king would be a “king to them all” (cf. Ezk. 37:24). This “one king” would ultimately be fulfilled in the Messiah (cf. Ezk. 34:24; Jer. 23:5; 29:16; 30:9; Hos. 3:5; Lk. 1:32-33). This one nation under one king would never more be divided!

Third, God will save them with a common salvation for all. This salvation will involve His people detesting idolatry. “Neither shall they defile themselves any more with their idols, nor with their detestable things, nor with any of their transgressions” (Ezk. 37:23a). “Idols” and “detestable things” were attributed to bringing the downfall of God’s people (Deut. 27:2-5, 15),

both the Northern (2 Kgs. 17:6-18) and the Southern Kingdoms (2 Kgs. 17:19-23). This salvation will involve His people's being saved out of "all their dwelling places, wherein they have sinned" (Ezk. 37:23b). This salvation will involve their being "cleansed" (Ezk. 37:23c), which will result in God's declaring ownership, "I will be their God" (Ezk. 37:23d). This salvation will be for those who submit themselves to the kingship and shepherding of God's appointed. "And David my servant shall be king over them; and they all shall have one shepherd: they shall also walk in my judgments, and observe my statutes, and do them" (Ezk. 37:24). This salvation will involve a permanent dwelling place, figuratively portrayed as "the land that I have given unto Jacob my servant" (Ezk. 37:25). "My servant David" is again mentioned as the one who will be "their prince." This David is not the literal son of Jesse, but a reference to the Messiah (cf. Ezk. 34:23-24); thus, "the land" is not a reference to the literal land of Canaan, but to the ultimate spiritual dwelling of the Messianic kingdom (cf. Ezk. 40:1-48:35; Heb. 4:1-10; 11:8-10, 13-16). Smith correctly summarizes, "A 'forever' kingdom ruled by a 'forever' prince points to a new order of things."

Fourth, God will make a new "covenant of peace" with His people, which will be "an everlasting covenant" (Ezk. 37:26a). This covenant of peace was alluded to earlier, when Ezekiel wrote,

I will make with them a covenant of peace, and will cause the evil beasts to cease out of the land: and they shall dwell safely in the wilderness, and sleep in the woods. ... ²⁸And they shall no more be a prey to the heathen, neither shall the beast of the land devour them; but they shall dwell safely, and none shall make them afraid. ²⁹And I will raise up for them a plant of renown, and they shall be no more consumed with hunger in the land, neither bear the shame of the heathen any more. (Ezk. 34:25-29)

The reference of being at peace while dwelling in the land was also taught by other prophets (Isa.

11:6-9; 35:9; Jer. 23:6). This covenant also would be everlasting and distinctly different from the one given at Mount Sinai (cf. Jer. 31:31-34). There were two main differences Ezekiel mentioned. One was that God would “place them, and multiply them” (Ezk. 37:26b), which is a reference to the inclusion of Gentiles (cf. Isa. 49:6; 60:3; Dan. 7:14). The other is that God would “set my sanctuary in the midst of them for evermore” and “My tabernacle also shall be with them” (Ezk. 37:26c), which are references to God’s once again being in covenant relationship with His people and dwelling in their midst. Earlier, God Himself was the sanctuary for His people (Ezk. 11:16), until He withdrew from them because of their idolatry, and later in the book, God’s dwelling was figuratively portrayed in the new temple (Ezk. 40:5-43:9).

All this would be done to show “the heathen ... that I the LORD do sanctify Israel” (Ezk. 37:28). When these things came to pass, no one, not even the enemies of God, would be able to rationally deny that the God of Israel was the only true God! For some, this acknowledgment would come too late (cf. Phil. 2:10-11). Ezekiel emphasized knowledge throughout this book by a form of “then shall know ...,” which is seen in the following: (1) God’s sovereignty before the destruction of Jerusalem (Ezk. 2:5; 5:13; 6:7, 10, 13-14; 7:4, 9, 27; 11:10, 12; 12:15-16, 20, 25; 13:9, 14, 21, 23; 14:8, 23; 15:7; 16:62; 17:21, 24; 20:12, 20, 26, 38, 42, 44; 21:5; 22:16, 22; 23:49; 24:24, 27); (2) God’s sovereignty over the nations (Ezk. 25:5, 7, 11, 14, 17; 26:6; 28:22-24, 26; 29:6, 9, 16, 21; 30:8, 19, 25-26; 32:15); and (3) God’s sovereignty after the destruction of Jerusalem (Ezk. 33:29, 33; 34:27; 35:4, 9, 12, 15; 36:11, 23, 36, 38; 37:6, 13-14, 28; 38:14, 16, 23; 39:6-7, 22-23, 28) (Stearsman 32-34).

Mormon Abuse of Ezekiel 37

Like the Mormon visitor mentioned in the beginning of this article, the main abuse

Mormonism commits with Ezekiel 37 is to make the prophecy of the two sticks (Ezk. 37:15-28) a prophecy of the Book of Mormon coming together with the Bible to make the complete revelation of God. In fact, according to Mormonism, “The Book of Mormon is the anciently prophesied book that joins with the Bible to unite mankind to the truth in latter-days as part of the preparatory gathering work prior to the second coming of the Lord” (Meservy 10). The “preparatory gathering work” that is in mind is the gathering of the Northern and Southern Kingdoms spoken about in Ezekiel 37, to which the Mormons would add the supposed “descendants of Joseph” such as the “Nephite branch,” the “lineage of Zoran,” and the “Companions of Mulek,” and those who migrated and died in Rome, Russia, the Americas, and/or Germany (Meservy 5-6). Obviously, Mormonism needs other “revelations” to justify their beliefs of whom God’s people consist. Informed Mormons know the Bible alone does not prove these other lineages!

Mormon Abuse of Ezekiel’s “Sticks”

In order to get one of the “sticks” of Ezekiel 37 to be the Book of Mormon, Mormonism says that Ezekiel actually held and wrote on two Babylonian-type wax writing boards when he enacted the prophecy of the two sticks. Mormonism explains that the Hebrew word translated in KJV as “stick” (from *'ets*) can also mean “tree, timber, helve, plank, stalk, staff, stock, gallows,” and that context must determine the meaning in any given passage (Meservy 1). On the latter part, rational people would agree. However, Mormonism goes on to say that the context in Ezekiel 37 demands the meaning of wax writing boards as the medium the prophet used to teach his lesson.

In his article, “Ezekiel’s Sticks and the Gathering of Israel,” Keith Meservy, a Mormon,

says that at one time “Babylonian scribes were thought to write cuneiform texts only on soft clay tablets,” but a closer examination of their own writings suggest that “sometimes they copied their texts from a wooden tablet” (1). For a long time, scholars wondered how cuneiform could have been written on wood. In 1948, San Nicolo discovered that scribes were “filling their wooden tablets with wax” (2). He remembered that Greeks and Romans filled writing boards with wax and then wrote on the surface into the wax. “Since the Babylonians were filling boards with wax, he theorized that they must also have been using wax writing boards” (2). In the early 1950’s, “archaeologist Max Mallowan discovered a set of sixteen hinged wax writing boards in Assyria that looked strikingly like Greek and Roman writing boards” (2). These writing tablets consisted of panels of wood, with a slight lip around the perimeter of each panel that would hold in the wax, and they were joined together by hinges so that they could be folded together like a miniature room partition. These wooden tablets filled with wax also represent the “earliest known form of ancient book” (2).

Understanding this background, Meservy argues that the “sticks” in Ezekiel’s hands were actually wax writing tablets by noting the following. First, these archeological discoveries clearly show that “Ezekiel and his fellow Jewish captives lived in a world where scribes typically wrote on wax writing boards” (2). Second, the English translators could (and should) have used the term “(writing) board” instead of “stick” (KJV) and still be within the grammatical possibilities of the Hebrew word. Third, Ezekiel’s writing on each piece of wood implies that it was bigger than a small stick. Fourth, Ezekiel identified the owner of each board by an inscription, “(Belonging) to Judah, and (belonging) to the children of Israel his companions,” and “(Belonging) to Joseph, the [board] of Ephraim, and (belonging) to all the house of Israel his

companions” (Ezek. 37:16), which is what the Babylonian scribes usually did to identify the owner of each board (3). He then concludes by saying, “Since Ezekiel’s use of wood is the key to the [Hebrew] word’s specific meaning, and since what he was doing typified the technical actions of scribes who wrote on wax writing boards, Ezekiel most likely was writing on wax writing boards” (3).

As further proof, Meservy cites the New English Bible that renders Ezekiel 37:15-19 as follows:

“These were the words of the Lord to me: Man, take *one leaf of a wooden tablet* and write on it, ‘Judah and his associates of Israel.’ Then take another leaf and write on it, ‘Joseph, the leaf of Ephraim and all of his associates of Israel.’ Now bring the two together to form one tablet; then they will be a folding tablet in your hand.” At this point, Ezekiel emphasizes the ownership of the two tablets: “These are the words of the Lord God: I am taking the leaf of Joseph, *which belongs to Ephraim* and his associate tribes of Israel, and joining it to the leaf of Judah. Thus I shall make them one tablet.” (Italics added by Meservy)

In response to the wax writing tablet theory, although it perhaps is possible to translated the Hebrew word *’ets* as wood tablet, or even board, such a translation is not necessary in the context. First, it would be highly unlikely that Ezekiel would have access to the wax writing tablets that Meservy suggests, seeing they were reserved for king’s palaces and/or much more secure locations than where Ezekiel found himself, “among the captives by the River Chebar” (Ezk. 1:1). The items that Ezekiel used earlier to enact some of his prophecies were common items that meager captives would have, such as tiles (Ezk. 4:1-3). Furthermore, how many of Ezekiel’s contemporaries in captivity would have ever seen a wax writing tablet? The people’s familiarity with an object used in any action parable would be necessary to their understanding the meaning of the enactment.

Second, the word “hand” is singular. Ezekiel was told to join the two sticks, and “they shall become one in thine hand” (Ezk. 37:17). Also, the prophet was to hold the sticks “in thine hand before their eyes” (Ezk. 37:20). A natural reading of the picture suggests Ezekiel is dealing with small objects that would easily fit into his hand. However, the wax writing tablets were very large and bulky to handle with one hand. Mormon imagery does not seem to fit in this case!

Mormon Abuse of Necessary Records

Another area where Mormons abuse Ezekiel 37 is their insistence that there has to be a revelation giving the exact details of everything God said would happen. For example, Meservy says that Ezekiel’s “message indicates that in the day of gathering (the last days), Judah and Joseph would each have a record and that their records would be joined as one” (6). The Jews, or as Mormons says, the “People of the Book,” had a record of their history; namely, the Bible. However, “Latter-day Saints readily identify the Book of Mormon as representative of Joseph’s record in Ephraim’s hands. Judah’s and Joseph’s records do exist” (6). Meservy goes on to say, “Not only did Ezekiel (representing Judah) know that each of these tribes would keep records, but Joseph of old also knew that he and Judah would be keepers of special records,” and then quotes a passage from the *Book of Mormon*, Second Nephi 3:12, where the Lord supposedly told Joseph that “the fruit of thy loins shall write; and the fruit of the loins of Judah shall write; and that which shall be written ... shall grow together” (6).

In response to this, again, the Bible clearly reveals the interpretation of Ezekiel’s sticks to be the reuniting of God’s people, the twelve tribes of Israel (Ezk. 37:19-28). Ezekiel gives thirteen factors involved with this restoration of God’s people (Adapted from Cooper 327-328): (1) God will find Israel and gather the people from among the nations (Ezk. 37:21a); (2) God will

bring them again into their land (Ezk. 37:21b); (3) God will make one nation out of the two that had been in the land (Ezk. 37:22a); (4) God will set one king over the nation (Ezk. 37:22b, 24a); (5) God will insure the unity of the restored kingdom that will never again be divided (Ezk. 37:22c); (6) God will insure that the people will never again serve idols (Ezk. 37:23a); (7) God will save them, cleanse them, and establish an intimate relationship with them (Ezk. 37:23b); (8) God will enable them to walk in obedience to his law (Ezk. 37:24b); (9) God will establish them in their new dwelling forever (Ezk. 37:25); (10) God will establish his new covenant of peace with them (Ezk. 37:26a cf. Ezk. 34:25; Jer 31:31-34); (11) God will multiply them in the land, and they will enjoy prosperity with peace (Ezk. 37:26b); (12) God will establish his sanctuary among them and dwell with them forever (Ezk. 37:26c, 27); and (13) God will make Israel a testimony to the nations of His sanctifying power (Ezk. 37:28). Not a word of Ezekiel 37 promises a future revelation of how this will be accomplished! This God-inspired revelation in the Ezekiel 37 is enough! The so called “need of necessary records” has no grounds, but is a further attempt to convince others that the Bible is not sufficient, with which, of course, inspiration would disagree (cf. 2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Pet. 1:3; Jude 3).

Mormon Abuse of Resurrection and Gathering

While most of the Mormon abuse of Ezekiel 37 comes from the enacted prophecy concerning the sticks (Ezk. 37:15-28), they do abuse the resurrection of the nation as taught by the valley of dry bones prophecy (Ezk. 37:1-14). According to Meservy, the valley of dry bones not only showed a “personal redemption from the grave,” but also a “national revival” that “would not only bring scattered bones together again, but would also bring scattered peoples back to their land” (Ezk. 37:12). However, he then states, “By this revelation, Ezekiel assured not

only contemporary Israelites, whose graves were far from home, but later readers who might die in Rome, or in Russia, or in America, or in Germany that by means of the resurrection God would bring them back to their land” (6). Thus, Meservy asserts the prophecy to include non-Israelites and forces it to mean that these people will return to the actual, physical land of Palestine or another supposed literal land promise.

Meservy continues the abuse by stating that the gathering together involves three aspects: (1) a “spatial” gathering—“from the four corners of the earth;” (2) a “temporal” gathering—“from the various epochs of time;” and (3) a “spiritual” gathering (7). This last gathering is the most crucial of all, for, according to Meservy, “When his people are gathered fully back to him, the Lord will be their God and they will be his people” (Ezk. 37:27) (7). Meservy says all this to make the point that “The unification of Judah’s and Joseph’s records would be crucial in this spiritual gathering to God” (7). In other words, humanity needs additional revelation to know when or how God is fulfilling this gathering of Israel. That additional revelation, says Mormonism, is the Book of Mormon.

In response to this abuse, it should be pointed out that the only time Mormonism needs “additional revelation” is when they need to justify the peculiarities of their doctrine. As with any other man-made religion, the distinguishing characteristics that make Mormonism what it is cannot be found in the Bible! What makes them distinct is not Biblical, but something found outside the Bible. It is impossible to have Mormonism with just the Bible alone. Literal descendants of the twelve tribes of Israel living in America, Russia, and Germany were not part of Ezekiel’s prophecy, but they are part of Mormonism’s shaky foundation, and thus Mormons have to have some justification for their belief.

One of Mormonism's official publications, "Chapter 42: The Gathering of the House of Israel," teaches that the ten tribes of the Northern Kingdom were lost after being carried away into captivity. After the two tribes of the Southern Kingdom were taken about a hundred years later, a remnant of them eventually returned and rebuilt Jerusalem and its temple. Mormonism claims that "just before Jerusalem was destroyed [in 586 BC], Lehi and his family, who were members of the house of Israel, left the city and settled in the Americas." Then after the incarnation of Christ, Jerusalem was again destroyed by the Roman army in AD 70. The Jews were again scattered over much of the world. Thus, Mormonism claims that "Today Israelites are found in all countries of the world. Many of these people do not know that they are descended from the ancient house of Israel."

This source further cites Jeremiah 23:3 to note the Lord promised that His covenant people would one day be gathered, and then says, "The power and authority to direct the work of gathering the house of Israel was given to Joseph Smith by the prophet Moses, who appeared in 1836 in the Kirtland Temple" (*Doctrines and Covenants* 110:11). From the time Joseph Smith was chosen, "each prophet has held the keys for the gathering of the house of Israel, and this gathering has been an important part of the [Mormon] Church's work. The covenant people are now being gathered as they accept the restored gospel and serve the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob."

The source further asserts that "the physical gathering of Israel means that the covenant people will be 'gathered home to the lands of their inheritance, and shall be established in all their lands of promise'" (2 Nephi 9:2). Note the plural "lands." By this, Mormonism means that "the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh will be gathered in the Americas. The tribe of Judah will

return to the city of Jerusalem and the area surrounding it. The ten lost tribes will receive from the tribe of Ephraim their promised blessings” (cf. *Doctrine and Covenants* 133:26-34). This “gathering together of Israel” will not be complete until the Second Coming of Jesus and “on into the Millennium.”

In response to this abuse concerning the gathering of Israel, consider the following. First, like many other man-made religions, Mormonism’s idea of the “lost ten tribes of Israel” is false. As noted earlier, God fulfilled His promise of returning a remnant of each of the twelve tribes following the seventy years of captivity promised in Jeremiah 25:11-12; 29:10 (cf. Ezr. 2:70; 3:1; 6:16-17; 8:35). Additional proof of this is found in the New Testament when the infant Jesus was brought to Jerusalem following the days of Mary’s purification. “There was one Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Aser [Asher, ASV].” If the tribe Asher (one of the ten in the Northern Kingdom) was “lost” following the Assyrian deportation of the ten tribes, how could Anna be identified as being from the tribe of Asher?

Second, Mormonism’s whole concept of who constitutes “Israel” is false. There is no God-inspired record of “Lehi and his family, who were members of the house of Israel.” Other articles in this website (www.mormonstudy.net) deal with the so-called “prophet” Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon, but suffice it to say here that neither of these sources are truly inspired by God! Joseph Smith is the author of an intriguing but erroneous religious fiction. The whole Lehi invention was a convoluted attempt to get the fleshly people of Israel to America. However, the Nation of Israel, as God’s chosen, fleshly people, ceased a long time ago. Spiritually, they ceased being God’s people no later than Jesus Christ’s death on Calvary, when God blotted out “the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of

the way, nailing it to his cross” (Col. 2:14). It was by the cross of Christ that God “hath made both [Jew and Gentile] one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; Having abolished in his [Christ’s] flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man” (Eph. 2:14-15). Politically, national Israel ended in AD 70 at the destruction of Jerusalem. It is impossible today for any one to infallibly trace his or her lineage back to any one of the twelve tribes of Israel. By the providence of God in the destruction of Jerusalem, those records have been destroyed. Those making up the New Testament church, who “walk according to this rule [the Gospel, not Mormonism],” are spiritually “the Israel of God” (Gal. 6:16)!

Third, Mormonism’s teaching about Israel’s “lands of inheritance” is false. As already noted, there is no fleshly Israel recognized by God any more (cf. Rom. 9–11), and God’s promises of fleshly Israel’s inheriting and then re-inheriting the promised land after the seventy years’ captivity have already been fulfilled! Besides that, the idea that “the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh will be gathered in the Americas” is foolishness! Geographical North America was *never* in the picture of any promise made by God involving a physical aspect of fleshly Israel! Again, the supposed “gathering of Israel” in America is religious fiction falsely ascribed as being from God!

Conclusion

The apostle Peter acknowledged that some Scripture is “hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction” (2 Pet. 3:16). However, Ezekiel 37 *should not be* one of those difficult passages because God, through the Holy Spirit and the pen of Ezekiel, clearly interpreted what He meant

in both the valley of dry bones vision (Ezk. 37:11-4) and in the enacted parable of the two sticks (Ezk. 37:19-28). It is only when a person already has his mind set on a foreign idea that he can approach Ezekiel 37 and not understand the plain interpretation the Bible itself gives. Why not just accept what the Bible teaches? The fulfillment of Ezekiel 37 has already occurred, ultimately in the Messianic kingdom made possible by the blood of Christ, inaugurated on the first Day of Pentecost following the Lord's resurrection (Acts 2:1-47). May the Lord help each reader to "walk in my [God's] judgments, and observe my statutes, and do them," so that "David my servant shall be king over them; and they all shall have one shepherd" (Ezk. 37:24)!

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