

# EZEKIEL 1–3; 33–34; 36–37; 47

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## Historical Context

The setting for the book of Ezekiel is Mesopotamia, northeast of Jerusalem. The prophet was one of the exiled, living in a community in the land of Babylon. Ezekiel found himself by the river Chebar (spelled Kebar on modern maps) near a town called Tel-abib (Ezekiel 3:15). Ezekiel wrote before and after the destruction of Jerusalem, even narrating how he found out about it (Ezekiel 33:21). His ministry may have extended from 593 to 571 BC.<sup>1</sup> Judging from the early dates offered by the text, the sixth year of captivity (8:1) and the twenty-fifth year of captivity (40:1), the prophet’s ministry may have lasted around eighteen years. A predominant theme in this book is the Lord’s glory, where it has gone, and when it will return.

## Ezekiel 1

### 1:1–3

Ezekiel 1, which is not chronologically the first chapter (see 8:1), begins in the thirteenth year among the captives. This detail comes from Ezekiel himself. Verses 2–3 were written in third person—that is, someone else was writing about Ezekiel. This alone tells the reader that this book comes both from the prophet and a scribe or school of followers. Whoever this editor or amanuensis was, they corresponded the date provided by Ezekiel to the fifth year of King Jehoiachin’s exile. Adjusting to today’s calendar, the “fourth month, in the fifth day of the month” was probably July 31, 593 BC.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Ezekiel* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1990), 15.

<sup>2</sup> 2 Kings 24:12, 15. Margaret S. Odell, *Ezekiel* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Hewlys, 2005), 15.

Ezekiel, like others before him, was of a priestly line. Jeremiah was priest (see Jeremiah 1:1). Isaiah was inside the temple, a place designated to priests alone (Isaiah 6:1). Isaiah had been preaching when the temple priests were somewhat obedient (2 Kings 19:2). During Jeremiah's times, the temple and priests were corrupt (see Jeremiah 6:13; 7:1–3). During his ministry, Ezekiel, a priest, would no longer be in the promised land. Therefore, in these three major prophetic books, the reader can see how the people were progressively getting worse.

### **1:4–14**

Babylon is in the northeast, but there was no direct route through the desert. The known route at that time was to travel directly north and then go east toward Babylon. The whirlwind or stormy wind was proceeding from this northern route. Although this could be a representation of the oncoming armies to Jerusalem, it could also be a symbol of God's presence. Clouds, fire, and stormy weather were symbols of God's power and glory in the Exodus story (Ezekiel 1:28; Exodus 19:9, 18).

The four living creatures have been the topic of much discussion. In the Church, some may associate them with the beasts of Revelation 4, which the Lord described in Doctrine and Covenants 77:2–4. However, a historical contextual approach may render a better understanding. Today, in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York or in the British Museum in London are Assyrian sculptures that each have a human's face, a bird's wings, and a bull's body. Some of them also have lion claws, and others display other unique features.<sup>3</sup> These creatures were representations of power. Assyria was Babylon's Mesopotamian neighbor, the previous dominant empire. Although these sculptures are not identical to the beasts described in Ezekiel, they do provide a reference to the culture in Mesopotamia where the prophet found himself. These wonderfully organized and tamed creatures, representing the Mesopotamian world, appeared to be under God's command. The following verses finish the picture.

### **1:15–25**

Along with the four living creatures, Ezekiel also saw four wheels. Although Latter-day Saint author-poet Henry W. Naisbitt compared the multiple wheels to family connections as the foundation of community,<sup>4</sup> there may be a better reading of this imagery. A more accurate reading for the time would be that the four wheels represent God's chariot, where His divine throne sits.<sup>5</sup> Chariots were described in other texts from the ancient Near East and Mesopotamia.<sup>6</sup> When all of these symbols are combined, the four

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3 See "Early Excavations in Assyria," Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History, Metropolitan Museum of Art, last updated August 2021, [https://metmuseum.org/toah/hd/rdas/hd\\_rdas.htm](https://metmuseum.org/toah/hd/rdas/hd_rdas.htm); "Assyrian Sculpture and Balawat Gates," British Museum, <https://britishmuseum.org/collection/galleries/assyrian-sculpture-and-balawat-gates>.

4 Henry W. Naisbitt, in *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. (London, UK: Latter-day Saints' Book Depot, 1854–1886), 26:114.

5 Ezekiel 1:26. Shawn Zelig Aster, "Ezekiel's Adaptation of Mesopotamian *Melammu*," *Die Welt des Orients* 45, no. 1 (2015): 10–21.

6 For texts from Ugarit describing divine chariots, see Cuneiform Alphabetic Texts (CTA) 4.4.8; 19.1.43–44.

Mesopotamian creatures pulled the Lord's divine chariot of glory. They were not taking the Lord away but were being utilized by the Lord to transport Him where He wished. It was God who commanded them.

### **1:26–28**

Sapphire is used often in the Old Testament in reference to God's presence (Exodus 24:10). The deep blue color of sapphire is a symbol of the heavens, where God's throne sits (Psalm 11:4). Fire is often used to describe God's power as well (Deuteronomy 4:24; 9:3). Scripture occasionally provides the interpretation of visionary symbols. This entire vision (chariot and throne) represented "the glory of the Lord," clearly stated in verse 28. Therefore, the imagery here and later (Ezekiel 8:4) progressively depicts the Lord and His glory leaving Jerusalem, controlling the powers of Mesopotamia at His will, as He accompanied His exiled people into a foreign land (Ezekiel 11:23).

## **Ezekiel 2**

### **2:1–5**

In the language of the Old Testament, the title "son of man" simply means "human." Certainly, the Lord had reassured the prophet of his divine calling and had given him an eternal perspective as He had with Moses (Moses 1:12–13, 39).

Ezekiel, a human called of God, had a difficult calling. In the words of the Lord, he was sent to a "rebellious," "impudent," and "stiff hearted" people, and they were all members of the covenant. Although these exiled Judahites were perhaps more rebellious than most, imperfection abounds in everyone. While serving in the First Presidency, President Uchtdorf taught, "I suppose the Church would be perfect only if it were run by perfect beings. God is perfect, and His doctrine is pure. But He works through us—His imperfect children—and imperfect people make mistakes."<sup>7</sup> Unfortunately, there are no guarantees in ministry. No matter how important the message, the hearer has the choice of listening or rejecting the Lord's counsel. Fitting are the Lord's words to the modern Church: "And if it so be that you should labor all your days in crying repentance unto this people, and bring, save it be one soul unto me, how great shall be your joy with him in the kingdom of my Father" (Doctrine and Covenants 18:15). Those who labor in the vineyard may produce varying results. In this regard, the fruits of one's labors are not always those who were willing to listening but the service that glorifies "your Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 5:16).

### **2:6–8**

As further instruction, Ezekiel was commanded to not fear his mission to the rebellious captives who surrounded him. On the surface, it appears to be a difficult command to control one's emotions or feelings

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<sup>7</sup> President Dieter F. Uchtdorf, "Come, Join with Us," October 2013 general conference, available at [churchofjesuschrist.org](http://churchofjesuschrist.org).

that may have developed over time. Notwithstanding, one proverb states: “The fear of man bringeth a snare: but whoso putteth his trust in the Lord shall be safe” (Proverbs 29:25). “Trust” is the Old Testament word for faith. In fact, the Greek word in the New Testament translated as “faith” also simply means “trust.” Faith is a principle of the gospel that develops during one’s life. On the covenant path, faith will grow stronger and stronger as we learn to trust our Heavenly Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. When a prophet or disciple was commanded to fear not, the Lord was asking that the faith they had been developing and nurturing over time be evoked and put to practice. “Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness” (Isaiah 41:10).

### **2:9–10**

The chapter breaks were added to the text centuries after these books were written. In other words, there was no separation between this passage and the verses of the following chapter. Ezekiel 2:10 flows directly into 3:1. In this pericope, Ezekiel was given a scroll (“roll of a book”) that communicated a sorrowful message. Judgment is always just, for both the obedient and disobedient. Our walk on the covenant path determines what the “book” will have in store for us.

## **Ezekiel 3**

### **3:1–3**

By eating the scroll, Ezekiel was internalizing the message, making it his own (compare Jeremiah 15:16). For the people, it was a message of “lamentations, and mourning, and woe” (Ezekiel 2:10). Yet, for the prophet it tasted sweet. The message was good despite its harshness for the rebellious because “the guilty taketh the truth to be hard, for it cutteth them to the very center” (1 Nephi 16:2). During their journey through the wilderness, the raw meat Lehi and his group consumed became sweet by the Lord’s blessing (1 Nephi 17:2, 12). Joseph Smith also used taste to describe good doctrine: “God has power to institute laws to instruct the weaker intelligences that they may be exalted with himself this is good doctrin, it taste good, I can taste the principles of eternal life.”<sup>8</sup>

### **3:4–14**

The people who would most likely reject Ezekiel were not Gentiles, the people of Babylon, or any other foreigners. They would be his own people. They would speak the same language. Jonah preached to the Assyrians of Nineveh and the people listened (Jonah 3:5). Paul was sent to and had success among the Gentiles (Acts 22:21). However, Ezekiel’s dilemma did not deal with language but with how the message was

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<sup>8</sup> “Discourse, 7 April 1844, as Reported by Wilford Woodruff,” p. [137], The Joseph Smith Papers, <https://josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/discourse-7-april-1844-as-reported-by-wilford-woodruff/5>; spelling original.

received. In Isaiah, the Judahites were compared to animals: “The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master’s crib: but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider” (Isaiah 1:3).

Ultimately, Ezekiel would see himself being transported by the glorious chariot he saw in chapter 1.

### **3:15–21**

At Tel-abib, in Mesopotamia, Ezekiel sat among the captives for seven days. There is much wisdom in learning to be silent and in actively listening to those whom we serve. Paul counseled the saints in Rome to “weep with them that weep” (Romans 12:15). Alma taught to “comfort those that stand in need of comfort” (Mosiah 18:9). There are times when God’s servants simply need to sit and listen and not speak the counsel that they believe the person wants or needs to hear. Job’s friends also came to sit with him for seven days (Job 2:11–13). This ministry of presence did not last long. Job’s friends came to be “miserable comforters,” judging and accusing him falsely (Job 16:2). Ezekiel had to be careful as God’s mouthpiece. Here, the Lord commanded Ezekiel to deliver hard words as the Lord’s watchman. That was his calling. It is the watchman’s duty to deliver the message; as Jacob says, “otherwise their blood would come upon our garments, and we would not be found spotless at the last day” (Jacob 1:19). Those who do not listen will be responsible for their own iniquity (Ezekiel 18:20). In the following verse, the Lord would show Ezekiel that his preaching would not begin with words.

### **3:22–27**

Commanded to move into a field, the prophet witnessed the same glory that was manifested in chapter 1. From the field, he was taken to his own house, a symbol of protection and familiarity. Now, from the safety of his own home, the Lord showed the prophet how He would protect him. The message is such that the people would bind the prophet, as Laman and Lemuel did to Nephi (1 Nephi 18:11). In order to protect the prophet, his mouth was shut, which the Lord sometimes does to protect His servants. In the book of Acts, the Spirit did not allow Paul to preach in Asia (Acts 16:6–7). Joseph Smith was told not to speak about the new translation of the scriptures (Doctrine and Covenants 42:56–57). Therefore, in a similar manner, the Lord shut Ezekiel’s mouth, and it would not be reopened until years later (Ezekiel 33:22).

## **Ezekiel 33**

### **33:1–6**

If the watchman performs his duty, he will not be at fault for the people’s disobedience. In this example, the man from the coasts was to warn the city, implying some distance between the spokesman and the people. Jesus said a prophet is without honor in his own hometown (Mark 6:4). Apparently, those who know the messenger best often struggle with obeying admonitions from him. In the formal rules of logic,

the *ad hominem* fallacy is when the person is attacked rather than the arguments presented for discussion. It is far too easy to attack or distrust such an important message from a neighbor whom you know very well. Nevertheless, the opposite can also be true. Often, a messenger from far away or from a different background is also rejected. Although Lehi had lived in Jerusalem all his days (1 Nephi 1:4), he was not a Judahite; he was from Manasseh (1 Nephi 5:16; Alma 10:3). Jesus was not only rejected by His neighbors in Nazareth but also by those miles south in Jerusalem (Mark 15:13–14). Ezekiel’s case was not any easier. He was a priest with no temple, and now he was commanded to remind an exiled people of their sins.

### **33:7–16**

The Lord does not desire that the wicked be lost. He wants them to turn from their ways and live a life of abundance and blessings, but this requires action on the people’s part. The Lord is committed to maintaining a covenant (vassal) relationship, which implies that the other party also live by the standards in the contract. In the ancient world, covenants were contracts. It was the people’s responsibility to repent, which in the Old Testament was the act of turning or returning to the Lord. In this, the reader is reminded that the first principles of the gospel are timeless (Articles of Faith 1:4). Repentance is a product of faith (Alma 34:17), which is always growing and being strengthened (see note on Ezekiel 2:6–8). As long as true repentance occurs, the Lord will forgive (Mosiah 26:30). The Lord is faithful to His end of the covenant.

### **33:17–20**

The Lord is just. Sin has a way of manipulating thoughts, making the wicked believe God’s laws are not fair. Earlier in the book, the Lord told His prophet, “Perhaps they will understand, though they are a rebellious house” (Ezekiel 12:3 English Standard Version). Wickedness does not lend itself to understanding. As time moves forward, Heavenly Father’s children have learned how our brains receive and store incoming information. Studying learning and pedagogy, accompanied by the Spirit, can help disciples improve their teaching skills. Manuals and lessons produced by the Church share valuable techniques that have proven to be successful.<sup>9</sup> As powerful as these lessons are, God’s children have been given agency, allowing them to choose life or death, in Deuteronomic language (Deuteronomy 30:19). Whether one believes God is just or unjust, everyone will be judged by their works (Revelation 20:12–13).

### **33:21–29**

In the twelfth year, Ezekiel found out about the destruction of Jerusalem. Chapter 1 has been dated to the fifth year of captivity. Eight years had passed and at this point, and Ezekiel’s mouth had finally been opened again (see Ezekiel 3:26). This is the length of time that Lehi and his family were in the wilderness for (1 Nephi 17:4). Ezekiel’s first speaking assignment was to the people from the Northern Kingdom of

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<sup>9</sup> See “Teach As Jesus Taught,” in *Teaching Guidebook* (Salt Lake City, UT: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2001), 4–8, <https://churchofjesuschrist.org/manual/teaching-guidebook/teach-as-jesus-taught>.

Israel, which had been made into a waste place more than a century before (Ezekiel 33:24). The people in Jerusalem belonged to the Southern Kingdom of Judah. These inhabitants of the wasted land (not deportees) held on to the story of Abraham about the inheritance or possession of the land.<sup>10</sup> However, the Lord commanded His prophet to denounce their wicked ways.

### **33:30–33**

As important as Ezekiel’s words are, they were taken as being merely entertaining or as a feel-good message. On the surface, the people appeared to be as good of missionaries as Michaiah (Jeremiah 36:11–13) or Abish (Alma 19:16–17), inviting everyone to listen to Ezekiel. However, there was no desire to change. Ezekiel had become a spectacle. The people did not follow any of the prophet’s admonitions. Despite the power of the message, the people were stiff-necked and hardhearted. The message of the Lord’s redemption of the literal land of Jerusalem (a typological representation of the ultimate atoning redemption) had the power to produce positive change. True disciples can do great deeds by the grace of God (Jacob 4:7). Elder Boyd K. Packer taught, “True doctrine, understood, changes attitudes and behavior. The study of the doctrines of the gospel will improve behavior quicker than a study of behavior will improve behavior. Preoccupation with unworthy behavior can lead to unworthy behavior. That is why we stress so forcefully the study of the doctrines of the gospel.”<sup>11</sup>

## **Ezekiel 34**

### **34:1–6**

The Lord used shepherd imagery to communicate the responsibility of the leaders of the flock.<sup>12</sup> In the ancient world, religious and political leaders shared temporal and spiritual responsibilities. These wicked shepherds had taken advantage of the people, retaining the food, representing temporal blessings, for themselves. The books that recount the wilderness journey, having been edited and updated,<sup>13</sup> convey this tension, most likely reflecting a later period. In Numbers, the people in the wilderness desired to eat meat (Numbers 11:4). However, in Leviticus the redactors explicitly stated that the priests were allowed to keep and eat everyone’s sacrificed meat (Leviticus 7:9–10), giving more context to the people’s complaints. This priestcraft would be corrected, and the Lord would bless His people in verses 11–19.

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<sup>10</sup> The same verb, *inherit*, appears five times in Genesis 15. See Thomas Römer, “Abraham Traditions in the Hebrew Bible,” in *The Book of Genesis: Composition, Reception, and Interpretation*, ed. Craig A. Evans, Joel N. Lohr, and David L. Petersen (Boston, MA: Brill, 2012), 163.

<sup>11</sup> See Boyd K. Packer, “Little Children,” October 1986 general conference, available at [churchofjesuschrist.org](http://churchofjesuschrist.org).

<sup>12</sup> See 2 Samuel 7:7; Psalm 78:70–72; Isaiah 44:28; 63:11; Jeremiah 10:21; 23:1–6; 25:34–38; Micah 5:4–5; Zechariah 11:4–17.

<sup>13</sup> For information on the palimpsest nature of Genesis through Deuteronomy, see Diana V. Edelman, Philip R. Davies, Christopher Nihan, and Thomas Römer, *Opening the Books of Moses* (Sheffield, UK: Equinox, 2011).

### **34:7–10**

In the Lord’s parable, it is the prodigal son who leaves his family (Luke 15:11–32). Here, the flock does not appear to be at fault; the culpable party is the shepherds. “They be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch” (Matthew 15:14). The shepherds had not protected the flock from the predators and worldly philosophies. In the New Testament, Jesus reiterated the importance of protecting the lamb-like disciples.<sup>14</sup>

### **34:11–19**

Jeremiah is told by the Lord that He would send fishers and hunters to search for the wayward members of His people (Jeremiah 16:16). Through missionary work, the Lord can offer the blessings of the gospel to “all nations” (Matthew 28:19–20). In the latter-day Church, the Lord has told the Saints to preach “to the north or to the south, to the east or to the west, it mattereth not, for ye cannot go amiss” (Doctrine and Covenants 80:3). All efforts to gather Israel, wherever they may be, are fulfilling the Lord’s mission.

By way of correction and offering a glimpse into the future reality, Jesus would do what these shepherds had not. Jesus would feed the people (Mark 6:30–44; 8:1–10), heal the sick (Mark 1:30–31), and call unto those who were scattered (Matthew 23:37).

### **34:20–31**

Most people would have been aware of the differences between these animals, which may have made it easier for them to understand the idea conveyed in this representation of judgment. In the law, the priests were told how to distinguish between a ritually pure and impure animal (Leviticus 11). Jesus also gave a comparable example using sheep and goats (Matthew 25:32). In Old Testament and modern times, the Lord purifies the impure in the temple. Ultimately, the one true shepherd or David would be Jesus.

The yoke imagery can represent the joining together of two parties (Matthew 11:29–30) but in the context of judgment can convey oppression or bondage to foreign nations (Deuteronomy 28:48; Jeremiah 27:8–12). The latter best represents the context of this chapter.

## **Ezekiel 36**

### **36:1–7**

The Lord spoke to the “mountains of Israel,” which represent the Israelites in this context. Although mountains often represent temples (see Isaiah 2:2; Ezekiel 28:14), the people’s wickedness made them comparable to idolatrous high places or hilltops (2 Kings 23:13). Since it was wrought with sin, the nations

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<sup>14</sup> Matthew 7:15; Luke 15:3–7; John 10:1–18; 21:15–17.



found Jerusalem to be very vulnerable. With judgment on the horizon, the Lord would defend not only the mountains but those who were scattered about in the hills, rivers, valleys, desolate wastes, and the forsaken cities. On the other hand, the oppressing nations would also receive their due reward. Judgment would fall upon the heathen nations and upon Edom (Idumea). Edom is southeast of Jerusalem, on the other side of the Dead Sea. The tension and betrayal from Edom toward Judah can be found in Ezekiel 35 and Obadiah 1. Such was the anger of the Lord against Edom that in Joel He said, “Edom shall be a desolate wilderness, for the violence against the children of Judah, because they have shed innocent blood in their land” (Joel 3:19).

### **36:8–15**

Once the people were vindicated, they would be blessed in their land. The harvest would be abundant. The city would be restored. One can imagine the vineyards finally producing good grapes (Isaiah 5) or tame olives (Jacob 5), as was initially desired. These verses depict the fulfillment of the blessing recounted in Leviticus 26. Ultimately, the Gentiles would not be able to harm Israel.

### **36:16–20**

The people were at fault for their sins. It was the result of exercising agency and having a just God. For comments on the imagery of a ritually unclean woman, see the note on Jeremiah 1:12–17. Often, those who were exiled are spoken of as an obedient remnant needing to be restored. Here, however, the Lord stated that many people in exile continued with their heathen ways, profaning God’s name. Anciently, name also conveyed reputation and authority. To be a witness to God’s name is to be a living testimony of God’s love and power. Disciples who bear the name of Christ (Galatians 3:27) must live according to a different standard. Jesus taught, “Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven” (Matthew 10:32). Despite our circumstances, the Lord expects His people to be a witness against all odds (see Revelation 2:13).

### **36:21–24**

Disciples of God are to be His witnesses at all times (see Mosiah 18:9). This is synonymous to being a witness for His name (Doctrine and Covenants 27:12). However, the house of Israel had profaned His name. One way the Lord established His name was by setting up His church, which bears His name (3 Nephi 27:3–9). When the followers of the Lord let their “light so shine” (Matthew 5:16), the Lord tells the people that “I shall be sanctified in you before their eyes” (Ezekiel 36:23). This may be related to the Lord’s teachings in the Sermon on the Mount: “The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light” (Matthew 6:33; compare 2 Nephi 13:22). Jesus taught the Nephites, “Behold I am the light which ye shall hold up—that which ye have seen me do” (3 Nephi 18:24).

### **36:25–38**

The sprinkling of water implies being cleansed and may be pulling imagery from the temple washings and purification. The words in Hebrew for “to sprinkle” and “water” are both used in Exodus 29. Water was utilized to describe the washing of the priests (Exodus 29:4). Later, the priest was to sprinkle the altar with the blood of the sacrificed animal (Exodus 29:16, 20). Here, idolatry would be removed and the believer, like the altar of the temple, would be sprinkled by the priestly Lord, “Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle” (Hebrews 9:11).

Although today the heart is associated with love, anciently it was equivalent to what today would be thought of as the mind. To have a new heart was to have a new perspective and outlook. This is fitting with the New Testament concept of repentance, as both the verb and noun in Greek literally mean to have a change of mind. Repentance is one of the first steps to more abundantly experiencing God’s blessings.

## **Ezekiel 37**

### **37:1–10**

Having been in Tel-abib (Ezekiel 3:15, 22), Ezekiel was carried to another area. Although the prophet’s valley of bones was in Mesopotamia, there was a valley of slaughter near Jerusalem (see Jeremiah 7:32). Little is known about Ezekiel’s valley except that the bones represent death, specifically the death of Israel as a people. Although resurrection is the ultimate fulfilment of Ezekiel’s vision, the imagery of flesh and bones communicates a familial relationship (Genesis 2:23; 2 Samuel 19:13). These bones and life-giving flesh are members of God’s peculiar people (Exodus 19:5). Verse 11 identifies these dry bones as “the whole house of Israel.” These bones will come to life through “breath” sent by God, harking back to the concept of new life in Genesis 2:7: “And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.” The word for “breath” in verse 9 can also be translated as “spirit.” The Lord would breathe life back into the people of Israel, restoring them as God’s covenant people. It is God who would give life to a fallen nation.

### **37:11–14**

Representing the “whole house of Israel,” the bones are dry, hopeless, and dispersed. To have the graves opened and the bones exposed meant that they would be taken soon “into the land of Israel,” no longer to be buried in exile. Ezekiel was living among these bones, the people of fallen spirit. He was with the captives who were separated, hopeless, and away from the promised land. For Israel, resurrection was the restoration of God’s covenant people.

### **37:15–19**

When speaking to his children, Lehi taught with imagery very similar to that found in this passage (see 2 Nephi 3:12). Thus, the standard interpretation of this text in the Church is that the stick of Judah is the Bible and the stick of Ephraim is the Book of Mormon.<sup>15</sup> Speaking about the stick of Ephraim, Elder Orson Pratt taught, “This book professes to be a record written by a remnant of the house of Joseph; while the Bible is admitted to be a record of the Jews, containing a history of Palestine and the adjacent nations, interspersed with doctrine. The Book of Mormon is the history of ancient America, interspersed with the prophecies of numerous Prophets who once lived on this continent.”<sup>16</sup> Together, the Bible and the Book of Mormon can confound false doctrine.

### **37:20–28**

Here the text pronounces what this prophecy meant in Ezekiel’s day. The two sticks represented the “two nations,” meaning (1) the Kingdom of Israel in the north that was partially deported in 721 BC and (2) the Kingdom of Judah in the south. The two nations (sticks) would be one nation. The tenth article of faith begins by saying, “We believe in the literal gathering of Israel and in the restoration of the Ten Tribes.” The Book of Mormon and the gathering of Israel are related. Therefore, one of the ways in which Israel will be gathered will be by teaching “the principles of my gospel, which are in the Bible and the Book of Mormon, in the which is the fulness of the gospel” (Doctrine and Covenants 42:12). This will all be done under the Davidic king Jesus Christ. The fullness of the gospel will be restored with sanctuary and tabernacle, even the temple of the Lord God. In the prophecy, the Lord taught Ezekiel about the Book of Mormon, the gathering of Israel, and restoration of temples in the latter days.

## **Ezekiel 47**

### **47:1–5**

Water in connection with temple imagery is common throughout the scriptures. Ezekiel saw water flowing from the temple.<sup>17</sup> The Garden of Eden also had four rivers that flowed from it (Genesis 2:10). Jesus explained to the Samaritan woman that to have a “well of water springing up into everlasting life” she would

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<sup>15</sup> Although Lehi’s family was from the tribe of Manasseh (Alma 10:3), in the late nineteenth century the Church began to consider the European Saints, who were identified as proceeding from the tribe of Ephraim, to have “believing blood.” See Armand L Maus, *All Abraham’s Children: Changing Mormon Concepts of Race and Lineage* (Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 17–36. On May 6, 1882, for the first time in the history of the Church, Elder Erastus Snow taught that Joseph Smith had said that Ishmael in the Book of Mormon was from the tribe of Ephraim. See Erastus Snow, in *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. (London, UK: Latter-day Saints’ Book Depot, 1854–1886), 23:184.

<sup>16</sup> Orson Pratt, in *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. (London, UK: Latter-day Saints’ Book Depot, 1854–1886), 2:290.

<sup>17</sup> Although many suggestions have been made for the meaning of *Zion* (stronghold, fortress, and so forth), Jerusalem is a Jebusite city, and in Hurrian the word *Zion* means “river or brook.” See Geoffrey W. Bromiley, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982), 1006. Therefore, Zion may be the flowing-water fortress-temple of God.

have to present herself before Him with her husband-to-be (John 4:14–16). In his dream of the tree of life, Lehi saw his family near to him and the tree of life at the head of a river (1 Nephi 8:13–16).

As the prophet walked further into the water, the water level rose. Jerusalem is an arid desert area. In that context, the vision of a river conveys life and hope. Previously the Israelites had been persecuted symbolically by “the river” (the Euphrates) in Mesopotamia, representing first Assyria and perhaps later Babylon (Isaiah 8:7). The river in Jerusalem, however, would bring life, not destruction.

#### **47:6–12**

This river would transform the Judean desert into paradise. Isaiah gave a similar prophecy regarding the dry desert of Judah: “The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them; and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose” (Isaiah 35:1). The sea in verse 8 is the Dead Sea. This visionary river proceeding from the temple would heal the toxic Dead Sea to the east. The Dead Sea coming alive could be another message pointing to resurrection.

En-ge-di is on the southwestern portion of the Dead Sea. There is no consensus as to En-eglaim’s location. Notwithstanding, the message is that there would be healing from one location to the other.

#### **47:13–21**

The land of Israel (to the north) had been inhabited by foreign nations after Samaria’s fall to Assyria (2 Kings 17:6, 24). This would create later tensions with the Samaritans (John 4:9; Ezra 4:1–4). Although not every place mentioned in this passage can be identified by archaeology, in this vision Ezekiel saw that the land of the northern tribes would be completely restored.<sup>18</sup> Joseph’s “two portions” are certainly for Manasseh and Ephraim (Genesis 46:20; 48:5).

#### **47:22–23**

Ultimately, all of God’s children will dwell in the land of Israel. In other words, all people will have access to God’s blessing. Paul taught, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28). According to Isaiah, the future temple would also be for all people: “Even them will I bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer: their burnt offerings and their sacrifices shall be accepted upon mine altar; for mine house shall be called an house of prayer for all people” (Isaiah 56:7).

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<sup>18</sup> On the formation of the northern tribes of Israel, see Israel Finkelstein, *The Forgotten Kingdom: The Archaeology and History of Northern Israel* (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2013); and Daniel E. Fleming, *The Legacy of Israel in Judah’s Bible: History, Politics, and the Reinscribing of Tradition* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

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