

Lesson 43 - The Shepherds of Israel

Ezekiel

Purpose: To encourage class members to fulfill their responsibilities as “shepherds of Israel” (Ezekiel 34:2).

My lessons take a different path than the Gospel Doctrine lesson manual. The lesson outline looks closer at the doctrinal topics included in the lesson purpose and scripture block. The lessons are designed to challenge mature, active Latter-Day Saints who have a solid Gospel foundation and are looking for insights into the scriptures that will broaden their faith and understanding.

If you are interested in downloading the PowerPoint file, links to source material or reading posts about improving Gospel Doctrine class preparation, delivery and engagement, you can join my Facebook Group and have full access to the content posted there. The link is <https://www.facebook.com/groups/188904648521022/>

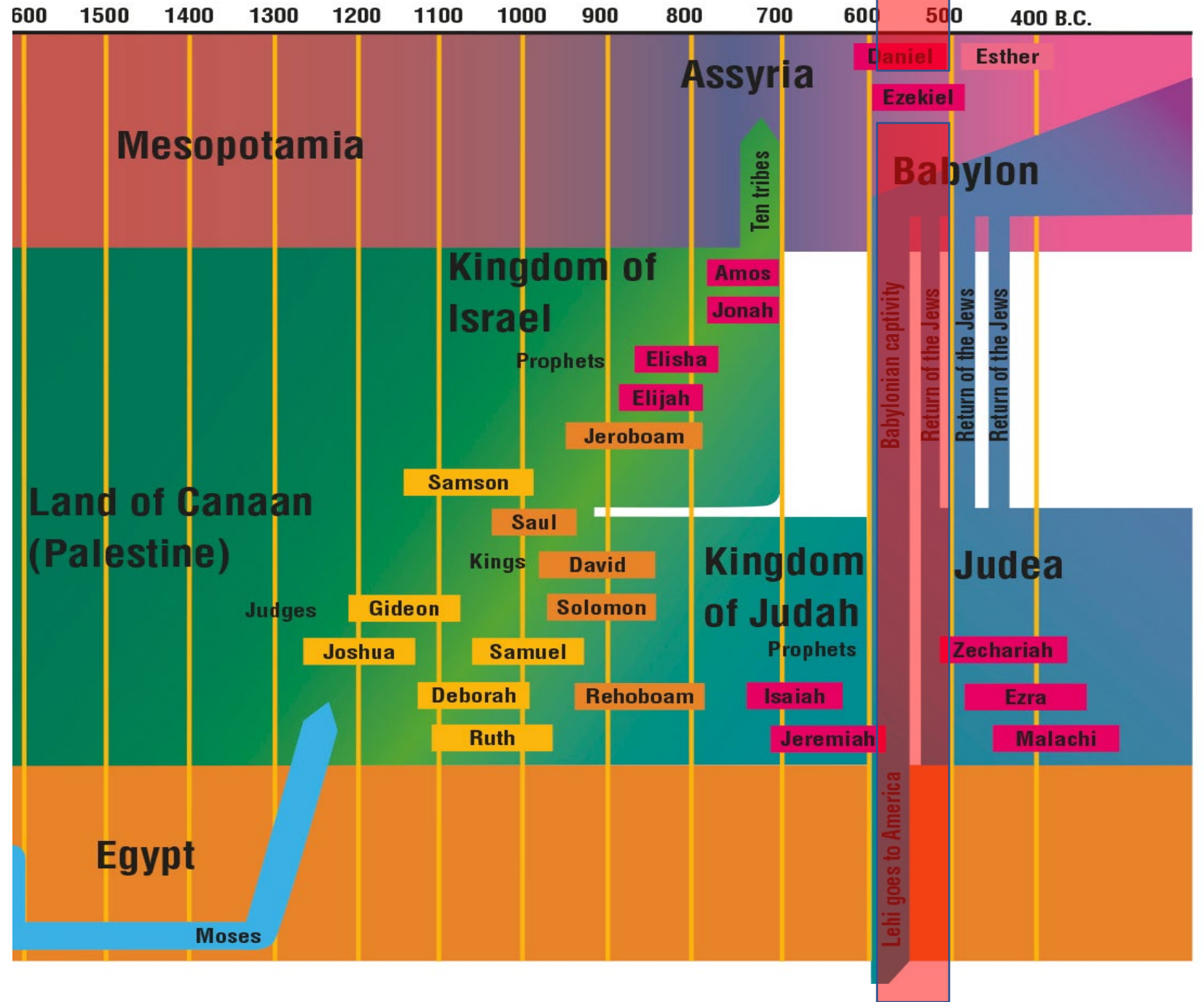
Last Week's Lesson Challenge

To recognize and acknowledge that Jesus Christ has placed his Gospel in our “inward parts, and write it in their hearts” we must live Gospel principles of faith, hope and charity.

Last week's challenge was to look for ways in our daily lives that we can show our acknowledgement of the Gospel in our inward parts and heart through ministering to those around us.

Would anyone wish to share their thoughts at this time?

Isaiah



Ezekiel

God will strengthen. A priest of the family of Zadok, and one of the captives carried away to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar along with Jehoiachin. He settled at Tel Abib on the Chebar and prophesied during a period of 22 years, 592–570 B.C.

<https://www.lds.org/scriptures/bd/ezekiel?lang=eng&letter=E>

Through Ezekiel, the Lord gave wayward and backsliding Israel a message of warning and reproof, of justice and judgment, of mercy and love that left no doubt of His indignation at their unrighteousness nor of His desire for their repentance. Ezekiel taught that all are responsible for their own actions and will be rewarded or punished according to the way they use the agency given them. He taught that no one can reject the Lord's counsel and escape the judgments that invariably follow justice and that are intended to purge the soul of iniquity. He taught also that no one who repents and turns from his iniquities will lose the blessings of God's mercy, love, and forgiveness.

<https://www.lds.org/manual/old-testament-student-manual-kings-malachi/chapter-26?lang=eng>

What role did shepherds play during Biblical times?

Shepherding is among the oldest occupations, beginning some 5,000 years ago in Asia Minor. Sheep were kept for their milk, meat and especially their wool. Over the next thousand years, sheep and shepherding spread throughout Eurasia.

To maintain a large flock, the sheep must be able to move from pasture to pasture. This required the development of an occupation separate from that of the farmer. The duty of shepherds was to keep their flock intact, protect it from predators and guide it to market areas in time for shearing. In ancient times, shepherds also commonly milked their sheep, and made cheese from this milk.

In many societies, shepherds were an important part of the economy. Unlike farmers, shepherds were often wage earners, being paid to watch the sheep of others. Shepherds also lived apart from society, being largely nomadic. It was mainly a job of solitary males without children. Shepherds were most often the younger sons of farming peasants who did not inherit any land.

Shepherds would normally work in groups either looking after one large flock, or each bringing their own and merging their responsibilities. They would live in small cabins, often shared with their sheep, and would buy food from local communities.

Why are shepherds prominently used as a spiritual example?

A major part of our scriptures presents types and shadows of the coming of Jesus, his mortal ministry, and his mission as the Savior of all mankind. Certainly symbolism is apparent in the many references to the Shepherd and the flock. Indeed, the Savior himself used these symbols often in his teaching.

It would have been natural for the Savior to refer to sheep and the flock in his attempts to teach the worth of souls as he went about establishing his ministry. His fellow Galileans understood the value of sheep, the necessity for a flock, and the responsibilities of a shepherd. His followers could therefore more clearly perceive the truths that he was teaching them. And those he selected as his disciples could more easily understand what he had to say to them about their responsibilities in helping him carry out his divine commission.

In an April 1983 General Conference address, President Ezra Taft Benson said the following:

“In Jesus’ time, the Palestinian shepherd was noted for his protection of his sheep. Unlike modern shepherders, 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.

“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” (in Conference Report, Apr. 1983, 61; or Ensign, May 1983, 43).

Ezekiel 4:1-6

1 And the word of the Lord came unto me, saying,

2 Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel, prophesy, and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God unto the shepherds; Woe be to the shepherds of Israel that do feed themselves! should not the shepherds feed the flocks?

3 Ye eat the fat, and ye clothe you with the wool, ye kill them that are fed: but ye feed not the flock.

4 The diseased have ye not strengthened, neither have ye healed that which was sick, neither have ye bound up that which was broken, neither have ye brought again that which was driven away, neither have ye sought that which was lost; but with force and with cruelty have ye ruled them.

5 And they were scattered, because there is no shepherd: and they became meat to all the beasts of the field, when they were scattered.

6 My sheep wandered through all the mountains, and upon every high hill: yea, my flock was scattered upon all the face of the earth, and none did search or seek after them.

Who are the “shepherds of Israel” spoken of in Ezekiel 34?

Why was the Lord displeased with them?

What happened to the sheep when the shepherds neglected them?

The priests of Ezekiel’s time no longer cared for the Judeans the way that they were instructed to do. They took advantage of their high position to rob the people of their possessions and taxed them to sustain the priest’s luxurious lifestyle.

They ignored the suffering of the people and didn’t minister to the ill and afflicted as they were instructed to do.

Ultimately, without any spiritual supervision, the Judeans wandered away and looked for other forms of spiritual guidance in the form of idols and religious leaders who would further take advantage of them.

Ezekiel 4:11-19

11 ¶ For thus saith the Lord God; Behold, I, even I, will both search my sheep, and seek them out.

12 As a shepherd seeketh out his flock in the day that he is among his sheep that are scattered; so will I seek out my sheep, and will deliver them out of all places where they have been scattered in the cloudy and dark day.

13 And I will bring them out from the people, and gather them from the countries, and will bring them to their own land, and feed them upon the mountains of Israel by the rivers, and in all the inhabited places of the country.

14 I will feed them in a good pasture, and upon the high mountains of Israel shall their fold be: there shall they lie in a good fold, and in a fat pasture shall they feed upon the mountains of Israel.

15 I will feed my flock, and I will cause them to lie down, saith the Lord God.

16 I will seek that which was lost, and bring again that which was driven away, and will bind up that which was broken, and will strengthen that which was sick: but I will destroy the fat and the strong; I will feed them with judgment.

17 And as for you, O my flock, thus saith the Lord God; Behold, I judge between cattle and cattle, between the rams and the he goats.

18 Seemeth it a small thing unto you to have eaten up the good pasture, but ye must tread down with your feet the residue of your pastures? and to have drunk of the deep waters, but ye must foul the residue with your feet?

19 And as for my flock, they eat that which ye have trodden with your feet; and they drink that which ye have fouled with your feet.

First through His prophets and then through His own ministry on earth, Jehovah and Jesus Christ will again gather and feed His flock. Ultimately, the gathering will include all of His people that have been scattered because of their unfaithfulness and disobedience.

Jesus Christ will “feed them in a good pasture, and upon the high mountains of Israel shall their fold be: there shall they lie in a good fold, and in a fat pasture shall they feed upon the mountains of Israel.”

The high mountains were where the best grass was found for feeding the flocks. Only the best flocks would be able to go to the high mountains to feed on the summer grass.

What will be the Lord's judgement of the shepherds of Judah that took advantage of the people?

17 And as for you, O my flock, thus saith the Lord God; Behold, I judge between cattle and cattle, between the rams and the he goats.

18 Seemeth it a small thing unto you to have eaten up the good pasture, but ye must tread down with your feet the residue of your pastures? and to have drunk of the deep waters, but ye must foul the residue with your feet?

19 And as for my flock, they eat that which ye have trodden with your feet; and they drink that which ye have fouled with your feet.

Who are the Lord's shepherds today?

President Spencer W. Kimball said the following:

“As we read and study the scriptures, we are made conscious of the fact that the Savior has always been concerned about the welfare of the members of his flock, both individually and collectively. It is about that principle of caring for and ministering to the needs of the Church membership in these troubled days that I desire to speak to you brethren tonight.

“Bishops and branch presidents, please be ever alert to the needs of the precious individuals and families who make up the membership of your wards and branches. You are the nurturing shepherds of our people. To the greatest extent possible, let your counselors and others who serve and work under your direction be the managers of programs. If you will pursue this emphasis, you will often be able to detect very early some of those members who have serious difficulties, while their challenges and problems are still small and manageable. Be conscious of the little tensions and problems you may see in families so that you can give the required attention, counsel, and love when it is most needed. An hour with a troubled boy or girl now may save him or her, and is infinitely better than the hundreds of hours spent in their later lives in the reclamation of a boy or girl if they become inactive.

<https://www.lds.org/manual/old-testament-student-manual-kings-malachi/chapter-27?lang=eng>

Are those who are called to leadership positions the only ones who are shepherds today?

President Kimball continued with the following:

“As we have said so many times, delegate those tasks which others can do so that you are free to do those things which you, and you alone, can do. Home teachers are to help watch over the flock. Even though they don’t counsel as bishops and branch presidents do, home teachers can render much appropriate and preventive help under the direction of the quorum leaders and bishoprics.”

<https://www.lds.org/manual/old-testament-student-manual-kings-malachi/chapter-27?lang=eng>

Today, with the discontinuance of the Home and Visiting Teaching programs, individual members bear a greater responsibility to be shepherds to the Lord’s flock. The Ministering program is based upon the concept that we are following the Lord’s instruction to “feed my sheep” as we are shepherds to those around us including family, neighbors, friends, acquaintances and strangers.

This Week's Lesson Challenge

There are many in diverse circumstances who are in need of a shepherd in their lives. Sometimes all a shepherd needs to do is be a good, listener who is always there in times of need. Sometimes a shepherd needs to go the extra mile and give of themselves in large ways to feed the flock.

This week pray for guidance regarding what is your role as the Lord's shepherd in Israel. Pray for the opportunity to be the Lord's hand in helping someone in need.