

ENGAGING GOSPEL DOCTRINE 120.2

Lesson 43 (Study Notes): [The Shepherds of Israel](#)

Class Member Reading: Ezekiel 18; 34; 37; Psalm 23; Alma 5:7-14

Ezekiel 18: Personal responsibility/accountability/agency

34: False human shepherds/God as true shepherd

37: Restoration: resurrection and reunification (dry bones and two sticks)

Psalm 23:

Alma 5:7-14

Ezekiel 18

34

37

Individual Retribution

18The word of the Lord came to me: ²What do you mean by repeating this proverb concerning the land of Israel, ‘The parents have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge’? ³As I live, says the Lord God, this proverb shall no more be used by you in Israel. ⁴Know that all lives are mine; the life of the parent as well as the life of the child is mine: it is only the person who sins that shall die. **Personal accountability, though our parents and others also influence us. This is a shift away from a corporate/group responsibility model.**

⁵ If a man is righteous and does what is lawful and right— ⁶if he does not eat upon the mountains or lift up his eyes to the idols of the house of Israel, does not defile his neighbour’s wife or approach a woman during her menstrual period, ⁷**does not oppress** anyone, but restores to the debtor his pledge, commits no robbery, gives his bread to the hungry and covers the naked with a garment, ⁸does not take advance or accrued interest, withholds his hand from iniquity, executes true justice between contending parties, ⁹follows my statutes, and is careful to observe my ordinances, acting faithfully—**such a one is righteous; he shall surely live**, says the Lord God. **Note the combination of purity and ethical requirements.**

¹⁰ If he has a son who is violent, a shedder of blood, ¹¹who does any of these things (though his father does none of them), who eats upon the mountains, defiles his neighbour’s wife, ¹²oppresses the poor and needy, commits robbery, does not restore the pledge, lifts up his eyes to the idols, commits abomination, ¹³takes advance or accrued interest; shall he then live? He shall

not. He has done all these abominable things; he shall surely die; **his blood shall be upon himself.**

14 But if this man has a son who sees all the sins that his father has done, considers, and does not do likewise, ([learning from bad examples](#)) ¹⁵who does not eat upon the mountains or lift up his eyes to the idols of the house of Israel, does not defile his neighbour's wife, ¹⁶does not wrong anyone, exacts no pledge, commits no robbery, but gives his bread to the hungry and covers the naked with a garment, ¹⁷withholds his hand from iniquity, takes no advance or accrued interest, observes my ordinances, and follows my statutes; he shall not die for his father's iniquity; he shall surely live. ¹⁸As for his father, because he practised extortion, robbed his brother, and did what is not good among his people, he dies for his iniquity.

19 Yet you say, 'Why should not the son suffer for the iniquity of the father?' When the son has done what is lawful and right, and has been careful to observe all my statutes, he shall surely live. ²⁰The person who sins shall die. A child shall not suffer for the iniquity of a parent, nor a parent suffer for the iniquity of a child; the righteousness of the righteous shall be his own, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be his own. [Ezekial directly challenges the 10 commandments!](#) ([Ex 20:5](#) , specifically). Great example of "challenging the scriptures". I think both principles have a measure of truth.

21 But **if the wicked turn away from all their sins** that they have committed and keep all my statutes and do what is lawful and right, they shall surely live; they shall not die. ²²None of the transgressions that they have committed shall be remembered against them; for the righteousness that they have done they shall live. ²³Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked, says the Lord God, and not **rather that they should turn from their ways and live?** ²⁴But when the righteous turn away from their righteousness and commit iniquity and do the same abominable things that the wicked do, shall they live? None of the righteous deeds that they have done shall be remembered; for the treachery of which they are guilty and the sin they have committed, they shall die.

25 Yet you say, 'The way of the Lord is unfair.' Hear now, O house of Israel: Is my way unfair? Is it not your ways that are unfair? ²⁶When the righteous turn away from their righteousness and commit iniquity, they shall die for it; for the iniquity that they have committed they shall die. ²⁷Again, when the wicked turn away from the wickedness they have committed and do what is lawful and right, they shall save their life. ²⁸Because they considered and turned away from all the transgressions that they had committed, they shall surely live; they shall not die. ²⁹Yet the house of Israel says, 'The way of the Lord is unfair.' O house of Israel, are my ways unfair? Is it not your ways that are unfair?

30 Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, all of you according to your ways, says the Lord God. Repent and turn from all your transgressions; otherwise iniquity will be your ruin. ³¹Cast away from you all the transgressions that you have committed against me, and **get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit!** Why will you die, O house of Israel? ³²For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, says the Lord God. **Turn, then, and live.** [Moving plea from a loving God.](#)

Israel's False Shepherds

34 The word of the Lord came to me: ²Mortal, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel: prophesy, and say to them—to the shepherds: Thus says the Lord God: Ah, you shepherds of Israel who have been **feeding yourselves! Should not shepherds feed the sheep?** ³You eat the fat, you clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fatlings; but you do not feed the sheep. ⁴You have not strengthened the weak, you have not healed the sick, you have not bound up the injured, you have not brought back the strayed, you have not sought the lost, but with force and harshness you have ruled them. **This is a powerful analogy. Instead of feeding, caring for, and nurturing their charges, the shepherds/leaders not only neglect the sheep, but use and exploit, even kill them to enrich themselves.** ⁵So they were scattered, because there was no shepherd; and scattered, they became food for all the wild animals. ⁶My sheep were scattered, they wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill; my sheep were scattered over all the face of the earth, with no one to search or seek for them.

7 Therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the Lord: ⁸**As I live**, says the Lord God, because **my sheep have become a prey**, and my sheep have become food for all the wild animals, since there was no shepherd; and because my shepherds have not searched for my sheep, but the **shepherds have fed themselves, and have not fed my sheep;** (Powerful summary of unethical leadership) ⁹therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the Lord: ¹⁰Thus says the Lord God, I am against the shepherds; and I will demand my sheep at their hand, and put a stop to their feeding the sheep; no longer shall the shepherds feed themselves. **I will rescue my sheep from their mouths**, so that they may not be food for them. **Again, such vivid imagery—the shepherds are *eating* the sheep they should protect.** Troubling application in our own lives—do we see those around us as people deserving care, or as a means to enrich ourselves?

God the True Shepherd

11 For thus says the Lord God: **I myself will search for my sheep, and will seek them out.** ¹²As shepherds seek out their flocks when they are among their scattered sheep, so I will seek out my sheep. **I will rescue them** from all the places to which they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness. ¹³I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries, and will bring them into their own land; and I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the watercourses, and in all the inhabited parts of the land. ¹⁴I will feed them with good pasture, and the mountain heights of Israel shall be their pasture; there they shall lie down in good grazing land, and they shall feed on rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. ¹⁵**I myself will be the shepherd** of my sheep, and I will make them lie down, says the Lord God. ¹⁶**I will seek the lost**, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak, but the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them with justice. **Wow. These passages are so powerful. Gives me chills.**

17 As for you, my flock, thus says the Lord God: **I shall judge between sheep and sheep, between rams and goats:** ¹⁸Is it not enough for you to feed on the good pasture, but you must tread down with your feet the rest of your pasture? When you drink of clear water, must you foul the rest with your feet? ¹⁹And must my sheep eat what you have trodden with your feet, and

drink what you have fouled with your feet? The metaphor continues to do its work—not only do some of the sheep take more than their share, but they ruin the grass and water so others cannot benefit.

20 Therefore, thus says the Lord God to them: I myself will **judge between the fat sheep and the lean sheep**.²¹ Because you pushed with flank and shoulder, and butted at all the weak animals with your horns until you scattered them far and wide,²² **I will save my flock**, and they shall no longer be ravaged; and **I will judge between sheep and sheep**. Not only the shepherds are judged, but sheep who are not good members of the flock. We can discuss both the idea of “under shepherds” and being good members of the flock/our families, groups, and communities.

23 I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd.²⁴ And I, the Lord, will be their God, and my servant David shall be prince among them; I, the Lord, have spoken.

25 I will make with them a **covenant of peace** (JPS has “covenant of friendship”, which makes me think of “I will no longer call you servants, but friends” from John 15:15) and banish wild animals from the land, so that they may live in the wild and sleep in the woods securely.²⁶ I will make them and the region around my hill a blessing; and I will send down the showers in their season; they shall be showers of blessing.²⁷ The trees of the field shall yield their fruit, and the earth shall yield its increase. They shall be secure on their soil; and they shall know that I am the Lord, when I break the bars of their yoke, and save them from the hands of those who enslaved them.²⁸ They shall no more be plunder for the nations, nor shall the animals of the land devour them; **they shall live in safety, and no one shall make them afraid**.²⁹ I will provide for them splendid vegetation, so that they shall no more be consumed with hunger in the land, and no longer suffer the insults of the nations.³⁰ They shall know that I, the Lord their God, am with them, and that they, the house of Israel, are my people, says the Lord God.³¹ **You are my sheep**, the sheep of my pasture, and **I am your God**, says the Lord God. A clever adaptation of the covenant formula “You are my people and I am your God.”

The Valley of Dry Bones

37 The hand of the Lord came upon me, and he brought me out by the spirit of the Lord and set me down in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones.² He led me all round them; there were very many lying in the valley, and they were very dry.³ He said to me, ‘Mortal, can these bones live?’ I answered, ‘O Lord God, you know.’ (ie, **only God knows what is possible**)⁴ Then he said to me, ‘Prophesy to these bones, and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord.’⁵ Thus says the Lord God to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live.⁶ I will lay sinews on you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live; and you shall know that I am the Lord.’ (What seems dead and hopeless, God can make live)

7 So I prophesied as I had been commanded; and as I prophesied, suddenly there was a noise, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone.⁸ I looked, and there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them; but there was no breath in them.

⁹Then he said to me, ‘Prophesy to the breath, prophesy, mortal, and say to the breath: Thus says the Lord God: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live.’ ¹⁰I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood on their feet, a vast multitude.

11 Then he said to me, ‘Mortal, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, “Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are cut off completely.”’ ¹²Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord God: I am going to open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people; and I will bring you back to the land of Israel. ¹³And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people. ¹⁴I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you on your own soil; then you shall know that I, the Lord, have spoken and will act, says the Lord.’

The Two Sticks

15 The word of the Lord came to me: ¹⁶Mortal, take a stick and write on it, ‘For Judah, and the Israelites associated with it’; then take another stick and write on it, ‘For Joseph (the stick of Ephraim) and all the house of Israel associated with it’; ¹⁷and join them together into one stick, so that they may become one in your hand. (The Hebrew just has [pieces of] “wood”, thus “sticks”. Most scholars think this term refers to scepters, but it is also possible they refer to wooden tablets, which would make sense of Ezekiel inscribing on it. See Kevin Barney’s BCC post) ¹⁸And when your people say to you, ‘Will you not show us what you mean by these?’ ¹⁹say to them, Thus says the Lord God: I am about to take the stick of Joseph (which is in the hand of Ephraim) and the tribes of Israel associated with it; and I will put the stick of Judah upon it, and make them one stick, in order that they may be one in my hand. ²⁰When the sticks on which you write are in your hand before their eyes, ²¹then say to them, Thus says the Lord God: I will take the people of Israel from the nations among which they have gone, and will gather them from every quarter, and bring them to their own land. ²²I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel; and one king shall be king over them all. Never again shall they be two nations, and never again shall they be divided into two kingdoms. ²³They shall never again defile themselves with their idols and their detestable things, or with any of their transgressions. I will save them from all the apostasies into which they have fallen, and will cleanse them. Then they shall be my people, and I will be their God.

24 My servant David shall be king over them; and they shall all have one shepherd. They shall follow my ordinances and be careful to observe my statutes. ²⁵They shall live in the land that I gave to my servant Jacob, in which your ancestors lived; they and their children and their children’s children shall live there for ever; and my servant David shall be their prince for ever. ²⁶I will make a covenant of peace with them; it shall be an everlasting covenant with them; and I will bless them and multiply them, and will set my sanctuary among them for evermore. ²⁷My dwelling-place shall be with them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. ²⁸Then the nations shall know that I the Lord sanctify Israel, when my sanctuary is among them for evermore.

The Divine Shepherd

A Psalm of David.

¹ The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.

² He makes me lie down in green pastures;

he leads me beside still waters;

³ he restores my soul.

He leads me in right paths

for his name's sake.

⁴ Even though I walk through the darkest valley,

I fear no evil;

for you are with me;

your rod and your staff—

they comfort me.

⁵ You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies;

you anoint my head with oil;

my cup overflows.

⁶ Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me

all the days of my life,

and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord

my whole life long.

Alma 5:7-14

⁷ Behold, he changed their hearts; yea, he awakened them out of a deep sleep, and they awoke unto God. Behold, they were in the midst of darkness; nevertheless, their souls were illuminated by the light of the everlasting word; yea, they were encircled about by the bands of death, and the chains of hell, and an everlasting destruction did await them.

⁸ And now I ask of you, my brethren, were they destroyed? Behold, I say unto you, Nay, they were not.

⁹ And again I ask, were the bands of death broken, and the chains of hell which encircled them about, were they loosed? I say unto you, Yea, they were loosed, and their souls did expand, and they did sing redeeming love. And I say unto you that they are saved. *I think the most important salvation we experience in this life is a transformation of character. I love how in Mormonism salvation is not a destination, but rather a process of becoming like our Heavenly Parents.*

10 And now I ask of you on what conditions are they saved? Yea, what grounds had they to hope for salvation? What is the cause of their being loosed from the bands of death, yea, and also the chains of hell?

11 Behold, I can tell you—did not my father Alma believe in the words which were delivered by the mouth of Abinadi? And was he not a holy prophet? Did he not speak the words of God, and my father Alma believe them?

12 And according to his faith there was a mighty change wrought in his heart. Behold I say unto you that this is all true.

13 And behold, he preached the word unto your fathers, and a mighty change was also wrought in their hearts, and they humbled themselves and put their trust in the true and living God. And behold, they were faithful until the end; therefore they were saved.

14 And now behold, I ask of you, my brethren of the church, have ye spiritually been born of God? Have ye received his image in your countenances? Have ye experienced this mighty change in your hearts?

Additional Reading: Ezekiel 2

Ezekiel 2

He said to me: O mortal, stand up on your feet, and I will speak with you. ²And when he spoke to me, a spirit entered into me and set me on my feet; and I heard him speaking to me. ³He said to me, Mortal, I am sending you to the people of Israel, to a nation of rebels who have rebelled against me; they and their ancestors have transgressed against me to this very day. ⁴The descendants are impudent and stubborn. I am sending you to them, and you shall say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord God.’ ⁵Whether they hear or refuse to hear (for they are a rebellious house), they shall know that there has been a prophet among them. ⁶And you, O mortal, do not be afraid of them, and do not be afraid of their words, though briers and thorns surround you and you live among scorpions; do not be afraid of their words, and do not be dismayed at their looks, for they are a rebellious house. ⁷You shall speak my words to them, whether they hear or refuse to hear; for they are a rebellious house.

8 But you, mortal, hear what I say to you; do not be rebellious like that rebellious house; open your mouth and eat what I give you. ⁹I looked, and a hand was stretched out to me, and a written scroll was in it. ¹⁰He spread it before me; it had writing on the front and on the back, and written on it were words of lamentation and mourning and woe.