Description and Background

Between October 1963 and April 1964, excavators at Masada found scroll fragments hidden under the floor of what is believed to have been a synagogue. Some of these fragments contain portions of an Ezekiel scroll. This scroll, known as Mas1d Ezekiel, comprises four columns of text that correspond to Ezekiel 35:11–38:14. The largest fragment that can be read contains the first portion of Ezekiel 37, the vision of the dry bones.

Except for a few minor spelling differences and the manner in which the text is divided into sections, the Ezekiel fragments are identical to the Masoretic text.

Study of these fragments is yet preliminary. Professor Shemaryahu Talmon of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem has been given the responsibility of preparing transcriptions of these and all other scroll fragments from Masada. According to Talmon, the formal Herodian script used on the parchment fragments of Mas1d Ezekiel dates the scroll to the second half of the first century B.C.

The following passage is from Ezekiel 37:1–14 in the King James Version of the Old Testament and sets forth Ezekiel’s vision of the dry bones mentioned earlier:

1   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,

2   And caused me to pass by them round about: and, behold, there were very many in the open valley; and, lo, they were very dry.

3   And he said unto me, Son of man, can these bones live? And I answered, O Lord GOD, thou knowest.

4   Again he said unto me, Prophesy upon these bones, and say unto them, O ye dry bones, hear the word of the LORD.

5   Thus saith the Lord GOD unto these bones; Behold, I will cause breath to enter into you, and ye shall live:

6   And I will lay sinews upon you, and will bring up flesh upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and ye shall live; and ye shall know that I am the LORD.

7   So I prophesied as I was commanded: and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and behold a shaking, and the bones came together, bone to his bone.

8   And when I beheld, lo, the sinews and the flesh came up upon them, and the skin covered them above: but there was no breath in them.
9 Then said he unto me, 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.

10 So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood up upon their feet, an exceeding great army.

11 Then he said unto me, Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel: behold, they say, Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost: we are cut off for our parts.

12 Therefore prophesy and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD: 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.

13 And 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,

14 And 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.

Commentary

The Jews at Masada were pious and had enough time to properly dispose of this scroll. According to Jewish law, sacred books, when worn out or being discarded, had to be buried or deposited in a genizah, a specially dedicated site for the storage of old sacred texts. In the case of the Zealots at Masada, their genizah was under the floor of their synagogue.

The only other texts that were found under the synagogue floor were fragments of a Deuteronomy scroll.

Any significance that can be ascribed to this text on the basis of what is known about the community at Masada is purely speculation. However, in light of our knowledge of the goals of the Zealots and the manner in which they eventually committed suicide, the allusions to resurrection in verses twelve and thirteen and to the restoration of their land, mentioned in verse fourteen, are quite poignant.

For Latter-day Saints, it is intriguing that in the verses immediately following this vision, Ezekiel is commanded by the Lord as follows:

16 Moreover, thou son of man, 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:

17 And join them one to another into one stick; and they shall become one in thine hand.

These verses evoke strong images of what the Latter-day Saints believe is the latter-day restoration and the importance that scripture, both ancient and modern, has played and continues to play in accomplishing the work of the Lord.