

Elder Vernon Johnson
Animals

Labors of the Oxen
Apostles

In the scriptures, the name, “oxen,” is the name given to cattle that are used in performing work such as drawing a wagon, or carrying a burden, or plowing. Thus, the ox is associated with labor.

There are some Old Testament scriptures that through the use of figurative language pointed us to the work of the Apostles in the New Testament:

1. 1 Kings 7:23 “And he made a molten sea, ten cubits from the one brim to the other: it was round all about, and his height was five cubits: and a line of thirty cubits did compass it round about. 24 And under the brim of it round about there were knops compassing it, ten in a cubit, compassing the sea round about: the knops were cast in two rows, when it was cast. 25 It stood upon twelve oxen, three looking toward the north, and three looking toward the west, and three looking toward the south, and three looking toward the east: and the sea was set above upon them, and all their hinder parts were inward.”
2. 1 Kings 7:44 “And one sea, and twelve oxen under the sea;”
3. 1 Kings 19:19 “So he departed thence, and found Elisha the son of Shaphat, who was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen before him, and he with the twelfth: and Elijah passed by him, and cast his mantle upon him.”
4. 2 Chr. 4:3 “And under it was the similitude of oxen, which did compass it round about: ten in a cubit, compassing the sea round about. Two rows of oxen were cast, when it was cast. 4 It stood upon twelve oxen, three looking toward the north, and three looking toward the west, and three looking toward the south, and three looking toward the east: and the sea was set above upon them, and all their hinder parts were inward.”

References 1, 2, and 4 above point us to the buildings and structures associated with the temple. King Solomon and the children of Israel through the direction of the Holy Spirit built a large molten sea much like a circular cup that was set upon the back of twelve oxen. These twelve oxen point us to the New Testament work of the twelve apostles.

The molten sea was typical of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord gave the apostles responsibility to serve as a foundation for that gospel work:

1. Eph. 2:19 “Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God; 20 And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone;”

2. Rev. 21:14 “And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and in them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.”

This work of the apostles in laying the foundation of the gospel church is manifest in both the writings of the apostles and prophets and in the setting forth of the principles, laws, and ordinances that govern the gospel church and the true worship of God and the true discipleship of those who enter the gospel kingdom. The Lord commanded the apostles before he ascended back to heaven: Matt. 28:18 “And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. 19 Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: 20 Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.”

Today, the true church of the Lord Jesus Christ still looks to the teachings of the Lord and his apostles and the pattern of true worship and discipleship manifest by the Lord’s apostles to govern their activities and worship in the church and in the maintaining of proper church order and governance. Paul, told the young preacher Timothy: 2 Tim. 3:15 “And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. 16 All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: 17 That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.”

The Lord gave this labor to the apostles and blessed them through the Holy Spirit to perform this work and it is still a great blessing to us today in the Lord’s true church. Why would we ever want to change it or to depart from it or to add to it as the Lord gave it and the Lord is perfect in knowledge, understanding, and wisdom. It cannot be made any better than that.