

THE TWO STICKS

Last month I tried to show that the Bible, when completed, was God's *final revelation* to man, that it was all-sufficient to the saving of the world and that God Himself states (within the pages of the New Testament) that there would be no purpose or need for any further revelations. It follows therefore that any documents claiming to be latter-day revelations from God are, per se, fraudulent. The Book of Mormon is, of course, a classic example of this and one might well ask how Mormons can possibly expect the general public to receive further revelation while the Bible remains universally regarded as complete and authoritative? How can the existence of the B. of M. possibly be justified? How do the Mormons go about the task of justifying it? (By the way, it is not my purpose to bore readers stiff with references to the Mormon Church and this will be the final article on the subject for the present.) It is perhaps not generally known that the Mormon church has a vast hierarchy of officers wielding authority over tiers of other officers - indeed they closely rival the Roman Catholic Church in this respect. Time would fail us to describe the men who exercise strict rule over the Mormon Church but they include three 'Presiding High Priests' (after the order of Melchizedek, if you please); a Quorum of Twelve Apostles; Bishops; High Priests; Committees of Seventy and Seventy times Seventy; Elders; Patriarchs; Evangelists; Priests; Deacons; Teachers; Helps; Governments; General Boards; Stake Organisations; Ward Organisations; Other Officers 'as required'. Clearly the New Testament does not sanction such a priesthood of 'officers', and authority must be obtained elsewhere - hence the need for the Book of Mormon. This is why when Mormons visit our homes the very first priority is to convince us of *the need* for, and the authenticity of, the B. of M. How do they go about it? They explain to us about 'The Two Sticks' of Ezekiel's prophecy (Chap. 37) and try and prove that the B. of M. is, in effect, the fulfilment of that prophecy.

The Prophecy

"The word of the Lord came unto me saying, Moreover, thou son of man, take thee one stick, and write thee 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*: And join them one to another into one stick; and they shall become one in thine hand." (Ezek. 37:15-17).

This then is the prophecy which is the Mormon anchor-bolt in justifying the coming of the B. of M. Readers may be thinking that it would take vast quantities of very vivid imagination to see the B. of M. in that statement of Ezekiel's and surely few could disagree. Mormon reasoning is that since ancient scrolls were rolled on wooden 'sticks' Ezekiel must be referring to two scrolls (or Books) and that when Ezekiel joined the two sticks he was, in effect, predicting that the B. of M. is to be regarded as much the word of God as is the Bible. How will such a fanciful claim stand up to closer inspection?

(1) *First of all, there is absolutely no justification for assuming that 'stick' in the prophecy has any connection, in any shape or form, with scrolls or books. As a matter of interest the word 'scroll' is used only once in the O.T. and once in the N.T. In the former case it refers to the heavens being gathered together (Isaiah 34:4) and in the latter case to the heavens being dispersed (Rev. 6:14). The Hebrew word from which the word 'sticks' comes is 'ets' and it appears in the O.T. some 300 times. A few times it is translated 'sticks' but elsewhere appears as 'Tree'; 'stalks'; 'plank'; 'gallows'; 'helve'; 'staff'; 'stock'; 'timber'; 'wood'. One can readily see from this that 'ets' has a connotation in the realms of wood or timber and is light-years away from any connection with the Hebrew word for books - 'sephar'. When Elijah was sent to the widow-woman for food she explained that she was so poor that she had but a handful of meal in a barrel; and a little oil in a cruse, 'And behold, I am gathering two sticks, that I may go in and dress it for me and my son, that we may eat it and die.' (1 Kings 17:12). 'Sticks' here is from the same word 'ets' but surely no-one supposes (not even the Mormons) that the widow was referring to scrolls or books. Nor do we suppose that the man found breaking the sabbath, by "gathering sticks" (again from 'ets'), was in any way construed to be portending the emergence of some new book. Indeed in Numbers 17 we read of Moses instructing a representative of each of the twelve tribes of Israel to write their names on twelve rods (or sticks) and to place the rods in the tabernacle. One of the sticks would flourish, and would bud, indicating that God had made His choice amongst the twelve. Again surely no-one would be silly enough as to suggest that this writing on the rods had any connection with scrolls or books.*

(2) *Secondly, and unfortunately for the Mormons, Ezekiel himself explains exactly what he means by merging the 'two sticks'. Indeed God's purpose in instructing Ezekiel to go through the procedure of writing on the sticks was that He might provoke enquiry by onlookers. Unfortunately for the mormons we are not left to make our own assumptions on the matter but are given Ezekiel's own explanation of his actions. And what is Ezekiel's explanation? - it follows hard on the heels of the prophecy (in v. 18-23) — "And when the children of thy people shall speak unto thee, saying, Wilt thou not show us what thou meanest by these. Say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God...Behold, I will take the children of Israel from among the heathen, whither they be gone, and will gather them on every side, and bring them into their own land: And I will make them one nation in the land upon the mountains of Israel; and one king shall be king to them all; and they shall be no more two nations, neither shall they be divided into two kingdoms any more at all." Thus, we have God's own explanation of the lesson. The sticks therefore do not represent scrolls or books but NATIONS. After the reign of Solomon, the original kingdom was divided into two parts with Israel (basically ten tribes) in the north, and Judah (two tribes) to the south. God is saying through Ezekiel that the day was coming when the two kingdoms, or nations, would be reunited again. Thus the two sticks, with the names of the two kingdoms written thereon, were used as a visual-aid in communicating the lesson - "...they shall be*

no more *two nations*, neither shall they be divided into *two kingdoms* any more at all." (v. 22). Two Nations is surely a far cry from two books - and even a small child can see that the two sticks of Ezek. 7 has no connection whatever with books. There is not even a remote connection between the sticks and books, much less with the B. of M. This merely illustrates how 'hard-pushed' the Mormons are to find the slightest support in the word of God for sanction for latter-day revelations. If perchance any reader should receive a visit from the mannerly young Mormon 'Elders' and they get around to giving you the 'Two Sticks' routine insist that they 'read on' to verse 22 of Ezek. 37 (for they shall be inclined to stop reading at v. 19). Once they have read v. 22 they will find it slightly embarrassing to talk about *scrolls* in place of *nations*.

Pray About It?

In his book "A Marvellous Work And A Wonder" Le Grand Richards, Presiding Bishop and Apostle of the Mormon Church in 1954, says, "It is a regrettable thing that the world moves so slowly in the acceptance of truth. With such a marvellous book in our midst, the companion volume of scripture the Lord commanded Ezekiel to write, (the stick of Joseph) which he declared he would join to the stick of Judah, (our present Bible) why is the world so unwilling to accept it?" Not waiting for a reply, Mr. Le Grand Richards goes on to express the hope that many would read this 'companion volume' to the bible and would put to the test *the Lord's promise*. The 'promise of the Lord' to which he refers is as follows, "And when ye shall receive these things, I would exhort you that ye would ask God, the Eternal Father, in the name of Christ, if these things are not true; and if ye shall ask with a sincere heart, with real intent, having faith in Christ, he will manifest the truth of it unto you, by the Power of the Holy Ghost." This 'promise of the Lord' looks like a quotation from scripture, of course, but isn't, it is a quotation from the B. of M. (Moroni 10:4). Thus we have the B. of M. being used to prove itself. Those who look upon those words in Moroni as a 'promise of the Lord' do not seem to appreciate that if the B. of M. is fraudulent then so is the promise. And yet hundreds of thousands of intelligent Mormons are apparently duped by the not so subtle illogicality of such reasoning. Notice that *the Bible* does not contain any such promise - such a 'promise' is to be found only in the B. of M. Surely this is a matter of the cart being put before the horse. 'The promise' has no strength unless the authenticity of the B. of M. can be proved, and paradoxically, if the authenticity of the B. of M. can be proved then the promise is no longer required and is irrelevant. If, on the other hand, the B. of M. can be proved false, 'the promise' is consequently also false. The Lord is not so foolish as to make any such promise. When Mormons are asked *how* the Holy Spirit 'manifests the truth of it' to those, who in prayer, ask if the B. of M. is true, we find that there is some difficulty and mystery about exactly *how* this is done. They usually smile tolerantly, give a little cough, try and summon a profound facial expression and then explain that after their prayer they receive a warm glow in the chest. Most of us would reach for the indigestion tablets in such a situation, but here we have otherwise intelligent people trying to tell us that this is how God tells the world that the B. of M. is true. If anyone does not receive the 'warm glow in the chest' then the explanation must be that (in accordance with the limitations of the promise) they are not 'asking sincerely', or that they have not 'real intent', or that they have not sufficient 'faith in Christ'. These are the 'escape hatches' in a promise which, while particular in other things, conveniently omits to tell the prayerful devotees exactly *how* the Holy Spirit will indicate that the B. of M. is true. Thus even if you don't get the warm glow it does *not* mean that the B. of M. is false, it just means that you are not sincere enough. It is really a 'heads I win tails

you lose' situation which serves the Mormon's well, for even after the B. of M. has been *proved* to be a fraudelent book, Mormon's will glibly reply, "Ah, but it can't be, because God has revealed to me that it is true." "We walk", says the apostle Paul, "By faith and not by sight". (2 Cor. 5:7) The same apostle says that, 'Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." (Rom. 10:17). Faith comes by the function of *hearing*, not by seeing, and certainly not by feelings. The changeless God did not ask us to pray in order that He might prove to us (with a warm glow) that the Bible is true; that Christ is His Son; that Jesus rose from the dead; that Jesus is now at God's right hand; that He sent His Holy Spirit into the world: etc. etc. All of these things we must believe *by faith* (about which the N.T. has a lot to say) and such faith comes *by hearing* the word of God. The B. of M. may 'promise' what it likes, but God never promised any warm glow in the chest as testimony to the authenticity and integrity of His eternal truths. Surely nothing is more unreliable than human 'feelings' but thanks be to God that His truths are plain, committed to print and accessible to all.

If therefore, you should have a visit from Mormon missionaries and be given the 'Two Sticks' routine, insist that your visitors read on to verse 22 (of Ezek. 37) whereupon their most important prop for the B. of M. will collapse before their very eyes. If, as an alternative, they ask you to pray for God's confirmation of the B. of M. I suggest that you remind them that this 'promise' is not from God, but is merely a quotation from the B. of M. itself, (and just as worthless) and that we walk by faith and not by feelings. "We have also a more sure word of prophecy: whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the daystar arise in your hearts: knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. But there were false prophets also amongst the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that brought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction." (2 Peter 1:19-2:1).

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