



THE BIBLE:

Does it Prophecy the Book of Mormon?

One of the great missionary books of the Mormon Church is **A Marvelous Work and A Wonder**, by the late apostle , LeGrand Richards. It is handed out by the tens of thousands to investigators of the church. It is what you might call, a great soft sell.

In it, Richards asks the reader to view the Book of Mormon as something that has come forth as a voice from the dust, the stick of Joseph as told about and prophesied would come forth in the 37th Chapter of the Book of Ezekiel. He states:

" Until someone can explain where the record of Joseph is, the Book Of Mormon stands unrefuted in its claim to be "the stick of Joseph." (A MARVELOUS WORK AND A WONDER, pages 65-69)

This is a pretty important matter, for if the Mormon church can clearly identify that the Book of Mormon is actually the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies, it would take on a whole different light. Unlike the average reader of Richrad's book, who will go, "*Wow, maybe there is something to that.*" let's look at the scripture in question:

"The word of the LORD came again unto me, saying, 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: And join them one to another into one stick; and they shall be one in thine hand. 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 stick of Joseph, which is in the hand of Ephraim, and the tribes of Israel his companions, and I will put them with him, even the stick of Judah, and they shall be one in mine hand."

(Ezekiel 37:15-19)

The Mormon Church interprets this as follows. The sticks are really scrolls, the ancient form of books. The stick of Judah is the Bible, the history of that tribe. The stick of Joseph is the Book of Mormon, the history of his other sheep who migrated to the Americas. This is a command to make, or write these two records, and at a later date, they will combined into one recordóthe joining into one stick refers to bringing the Bible and the Book of Mormon together. Sounds nice.

Is this really what the text says? This passage, like all other verses in the Bible, doesn't exist in a vacuum. It fits into a chapter, a book, and into the fabric of the Bible, itself. In order to interpret it, we need to find and follow the context.. In this case, we find that the context involves a specific time. Throughout Chapters 34 to 48, Ezekiel is prophesying the return of Israel to their land after the captivity. This passage about the two sticks is right in the middle of that segment.

At the time of Ezekiel, the Jews were split into two kingdoms, called Judah and Israel (1 Kg. 12:16-24), each with their own king. As we see by closely reading the context, God was not finished speaking at the end of verse 19. Starting with verse 20, God, Himself interprets the prophecy for us.

And the sticks whereon thou writest shall be in thine hand before their eyes. And 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: (Ezekiel 37: 20-22)

First, God says that both sticks will be right there, *at that time*, in Ezekiel's hands. The Book of Mormon, or the LDS Stick of Joseph wasn't completed until after the time of Christ. So, the stick could not be the Book of Mormon, could it? Obviously, the Mormon interpretation does not fit with what God says here. Who is right?

What we really have is God instructing Ezekiel to apply a little theatrics to his prophesy, using two sticks to represent the two factions. Why is something so simple, so difficult to get through to a Mormon?

Because this is so important to understanding the Mormon mindset, let's look even deeper. *When is a Stick ever a Scroll?* Nowhere in the Bible is a stick used to symbolize a scroll. Ezekiel surely knew the difference between a scroll and a stick! He referred to "a roll of the book," meaning a scroll, in Chapter 2:9, the normal Biblical phrase for a scroll. The Hebrew word used here, however, is *ates*, which is translated as "stick" only 14 times in the entire Old Testament, 8 times right in this passage. It is the only word translated stick in the Bible, but it is also rendered in other ways. It is translated "planks" in Ezek.41:25 and as "timber" in Ezek.26:12. It is mostly rendered as "tree" (163 times) as it is in Ezek.36:30. Of the 300+ times it is used, it *never* refers to scrolls. It simply means a piece of wood. Sadly, if *ates* had been translated simply as 'wood', the LDS rendering of this prophecy would not even exist. Their whole interpretation is based solely on the English, and has no support from the original Hebrew.

Further, for the LDS reading to be seriously considered, the Bible would have to deal just with the tribe of Judah. And yet, when we look at the Bible, we find it tracks the history of all the tribes of Israel. You will find the story of the tribes in Genesis through Kings. They are all seen, with Judah receiving no special attention.

But Let's Be Fair About This. What if this is a prophecy of a second book of Scripture as the Mormons claim, despite all the problems? Does the Book of Mormon fulfill the specific requirements of the prophecy. First, the Book of Mormon never calls itself the stick of Joseph. Now, admittedly this is minor, but it would be logical to expect the book to refer to itself as such at least once.

If a Stick is really a Scroll as the Mormons say, then wouldn't the prophecy require that the *"stick of Joseph which is in the hand of Ephraim"* be a scroll? If that is what a stick is, the only way it could be fulfilled is if this second record is written on a scroll. However, the Book of Mormon was supposedly written on gold plates, not on scrolls. So, if a stick does mean a scroll, the Book of Mormon loses again.

LeGrand Richards uses another key verse or two to prove the Book of Mormon is prophesied by the Bible. Let's look just briefly at his *other "prophecy:"*

"And thou shalt be brought down, and shalt speak out of the ground, and thy speech shall be low out of the dust, and thy voice shall be, as of one that hath a familiar spirit, out of the ground, and thy speech shall whisper out of the dust."
Isaiah 29:4

Richards tells his readers that this refers to the Book of Mormon being brought out of the ground, a record of an ancient people speaking "out of the dust." The Book of Mormon prophet, Moroni, even applies this prophecy to it in Moroni 10:27. Also, the Book of Mormon has a familiar spirit for it contains the words of long dead prophets of God, like its counterpart, the Bible. (A MARVELOUS WORK AND A WONDER, pp.67-68)

Once again, let's check the context. To Whom is Isaiah Speaking? Right away, we find this prophecy is being given to a city called "Ariel" (Is.29:1,2,7). Ariel ("hearth of God") is actually the city of Jerusalem. It is in no way referring to any distant people, or a record they have buried, since Isaiah is pronouncing judgement upon the city by the Lord for trusting in Egypt rather than Him for defense (ch. 30-31).

Most of the events described actually happened when Judah went into the Babylonian captivity a few years later, so it cannot be applied to another, later event. So, once again, the context completely rules out the possibility that this refers to a branch of Israel in a distant land, having their record buried and brought out of the dust on gold plates. It just didn't happen.

To be fair; let's take the position of the LDS church and assume for a moment that the prophecy *is* speaking of the Book of Mormon. What about this claim? *What If It is True?* Mormons testify that the Book of Mormon does have a familiar spirit, and perhaps it does.

The Bible uses this term elsewhere, and we can learn a lot from how it is used. Look in Lev. 19:31,20:6, 27 and Deut. 18:9-12. Those references obviously show that anyone or anything which has a familiar spirit is an abomination before God. A person with a familiar spirit is a medium—one who is on friendly terms with demons. Isaiah uses the phrase identically in Is. 8:19 & 19:3, so it is clear he fully understands what a familiar spirit is.

So, if the Mormons claim that the Book of Mormon has a familiar spirit, that's fine, but don't be hurt if we don't accept it as the Word of God.