

Mormon Scripture: The Book of Mormon—Part III

By Marvin W. Cowan

Mormon Apostle, Bruce R. McConkie wrote that “Almost all the doctrines of the gospel are taught in the Book of Mormon with much greater clarity and perfection than those same doctrines are revealed in the Bible.” And then he said that “Anyone... will find conclusive proof of the superiority of the Book of Mormon” (Mormon Doctrine, p. 99). From the time of Mormonism’s founder Joseph Smith to the present, Mormon leaders have declared that the Bible is incomplete and corrupted by translators and therefore inferior to the Book of Mormon. Yet, LDS use that “inferior” Bible to prove the “superior” Book of Mormon came from God! Many Christians have been confused by LDS explanations of Bible texts they claim predict the coming forth of the Book of Mormon. But God gave “scripture” in a context which also helps to clarify its meaning. When a text is given an interpretation which the context does not support, God’s message will be missed. An example that has often been used is Matthew 27:5 which tells us that Judas “went and hanged himself” and Luke 10:37 which says “Go, and do thou likewise.” Those words are in the Bible, but using them together is neither Scripture nor God’s message because they are out of context. Unfortunately, many people use Scripture out of context to support something they already believe instead of believing something because Scripture teaches it! We will now briefly examine one of the Bible texts which Mormons claim predicts the coming forth of the Book of Mormon.

Ezekiel 37:16-17 speaks of two sticks which become one. Mormons claim the sticks are scrolls containing the Bible and the Book of Mormon which become one witness for Christ. They say the stick marked “For Judah” is the Bible and the stick marked “For Israel” is the Book of Mormon. A Mormon missionary referred to this text and asked me what I believed this prophecy meant? I said, “Let’s read it in its context first and then I’ll tell you what I understand from it. When I finished reading it aloud, he said, “Oh, I see what you mean.” I replied, “No, you don’t, because I haven’t said one word about what I believe it says. What you see is what the text says in its own context.” The context is not about books of Scripture, but about the restoration of Israel as one nation instead of two nations as it had been since Jeroboam revolted against Solomon’s son, Rehoboam. When the book of Ezekiel was written both the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah were in captivity. The first half of Ezekiel 37 pictures Israel as hopeless, like a valley full of dry bones. But the Lord told Ezekiel that the bones would live again and by verse 10 the bones have become living people. Then in verse 11 the Lord declared “these bones are the whole house of Israel” and in verses 12 and 14 He declared He would put Israel back in her own land again.

The Lord didn’t change the subject at verse 16 when He mentioned the two sticks. Notice that Ezekiel is told “Take thee one stick and write upon it, ‘For Judah, and for the children of Israel, his companions.’” Then Ezekiel is told, “Take another stick, and write upon it, ‘For Joseph, the stick of Ephraim, and for all the house of Israel, his companions.’” In verse 17 Ezekiel is told to join the two sticks together so that they are one in his hand. And in verses 18 and 19 God told Ezekiel when Israel asks, “Wilt thou now show us what thou meanest by these (sticks)?” Ezekiel is to say unto them, “Thus saith the Lord God” and then explain how God is going to take the stick of Joseph and put it with the stick of Judah so that they become one in His hand. Then God said when the two sticks are as

one in Ezekiel's hand before the eyes of Israel (verse 20), Ezekiel is to say to them, "Thus saith the Lord God: Behold, I will take the children of Israel from among the heathen whither they are gone, and 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 anymore at all" (verses 21-22). Thus the two sticks are a visual aid to show Israel that God is going to bring them back to their homeland from their captivity and make them one nation instead of two nations like they were when they went into captivity. That is what the text says.

The Mormon interpretation of this text doesn't fit the context for several reasons. The subject of the entire chapter is the restoration of Israel, not books of Scripture. In Ezekiel 37 the word for stick in the original Hebrew language is "*aits*" which means a piece of wood. That word is not used for a scriptural scroll. The Hebrew word for a scroll is "*saipher*." Furthermore, Ezekiel was given the exact words to write on the two sticks. On the first stick he was to write, "For Judah, and for the children of Israel, his companions." And on the second stick he was to write, "For Joseph, the stick of Ephraim, and for all the house of Israel, his companions." Note that Ezekiel wrote on both sticks to identify what each stood for when he held them before the people (verse 20). Mormons do not believe that Ezekiel wrote both the Bible and the Book of Mormon, nor do they teach that Ezekiel ever held those two books in one hand before the people of Israel. But in this text Ezekiel wrote on both of the sticks and held both sticks in one hand before the people of Israel. Thus, the Mormon interpretation of this text is out of harmony with the context and with what the text itself says.

We will discuss the Book of Mormon again in our next article. For those who would like to read more on the subject in this article we suggest the chapter on the Book of Mormon in my book, *Mormon Claims Answered*.