



The “Stick of Joseph”

Some very earnest young men have come visiting me recently. They come to my door in twos and threes wearing ties on white shirts and black dress slacks. They wear name tags declaring that they are “elder this” or “elder that”. They are, perhaps, old (or is it young) enough to be my children.

I have a fairly good memory for things I read, but not so much for conversations. What follows is my recollection of the important points of a recent discussion with one pair of these earnest young men. Where I put their words in quotes (you will note that this happens rarely), I am certain of the words that were said. Where I don’t, I am writing down the gist of what I recall from the conversation, but it isn’t exactly what they said. Nor is this in the exact order our discussion went. Also, please note that all scripture references in this post are from the Authorized King James Version of the Bible. Usually I use the English Standard Version.

I invite them into my home whenever they come by, because though they call themselves “missionaries” they are in desperate need of a missionary to preach the gospel *to them*. They have learned a different gospel than the one I was taught, and it is not a gospel with the power to save their souls. Instead it will damn them to an eternity of torment in the lake of fire, for it adds the works of man as a prerequisite to the finished work of God.

I asked the most recent pair of “elders” that came to visit me yesterday about what they believe to be the gospel. They said to me that “we are saved by grace, through faith, *after all that we can do*” (emphasis mine). One of them further elaborated that when he dies and faces the Father, that the Father will see that he tried his best and so will grant him grace and entry into his kingdom on that basis.

Yet that isn’t what the Bible says. Paul wrote:

For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God; not of works lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.

- Ephesians 2:8-10 (AKJV)

Note carefully what this does *not* say. It does not say “after all that we can do”. In fact it says exactly the opposite. It says “not of works lest any man should boast”. Where this passage does speak of our works it speaks of them *after* our salvation. The only works that we can do that will please God are those we do once he has saved us. The passage says “we are his workmanship *created in Christ Jesus* unto good works”. Unless a man has been saved he is *not* “in Christ”.

Therefore the good works that we might do can only come after we have received our salvation. God has prepared those works for us, and out of a joyful heart the redeemed will do them. But those works are never what saves us. The Lord will not say to us “You were a sinner, but you tried your best. Come, enter my kingdom.” The Lord does not add his grace to our works.

The “gospel” that this “elder” wanted to preach to me has it backwards. It is “another gospel” and it cannot save us. We Christians are warned about this very thing:

But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed.

- Galatians 1:8-9 (AKJV)

We didn't go there in this conversation though, although other conversations with other “elders” have. Instead the discussion turned for a while to “scripture”. The “elder” that had been doing most of the speaking to that point then told me that they believed in the Bible as scripture, and in the Book of Mormon. He told me how it was another testament of Jesus Christ (recall if you will Galatians 1:8-9, quoted earlier). He described how it told the story of how Jesus after his resurrection came to the new world to preach the gospel, but he didn't go into much detail.

For example he didn't also say that the Book of Mormon makes the claim that before the capture of Israel by Assyria a group of Israelites went to the edge of the Arabian peninsula, crafted a ship and traveled to the new world, nor did he describe anything else in the Book of Mormon. I suspected that he was laying the groundwork for those stories but wasn't ready to go there just yet, and we never did get there.

The other “elder” at some point, and if I recall correctly it was at about this point in our conversation, asked me if I had studied the Book of Mormon. I admitted I had not. Because I haven't. On the other hand, I have read much *about* the Book of Mormon. However, I don't view it as scripture, and I wanted to keep our conversation centered on something we both could agree was scripture, so I only answered that I had not.

I asked them why they personally believed that the Book of Mormon was scripture. One of them answered that he had “the testimony of the Holy Spirit.” I asked him to clarify that and

he said that he had considered it, and prayed about it and had peace in his heart about it. He then proceeded to tell me that that peace was one of the fruits of the Spirit, referencing Galatians 5:22-23. While peace *is* one of the fruits of the Spirit, this seemed a weak argument to me.

I asked him, "Doesn't the Bible say that the heart is deceitfully wicked?" He didn't understand at first what I was saying, so I had to explain how it was that no man truly seeks God, that we were all worthless and gone astray, and that no one was righteous, referencing Psalm 14:1-3 and Psalm 53:1-3. Of course his response was that if that was the case, then we would all be going to Hell. My response was that we are saved, not through any effort of our own, but that while we were dead in our trespasses and sins, the Father, through his love and mercy would draw those he had chosen to Christ, and that Christ would never cast out those who truly came to him, but that the wicked heart of those who had not been drawn to Jesus would deceive them.

Considering that, they asked me how I could be sure that the Bible was the word of God. I told them that I believed it based on evidence, and not on feelings. I told them that to my knowledge there were over 25,000 archeological pieces of evidence supporting the Bible as history. I told them of its self consistency. I told them how it attests to itself as being the word of God. There was much more I could have told them about how the Bible had been remarkably preserved down through the ages or how we have more manuscripts available as evidence that the Bible we have received through the ages is the same one that was produced by Moses, the prophets, and by the apostles. But I didn't keep going, it didn't seem necessary.

They responded that that seemed a reasonable argument. Then they tried to tell me that the Bible itself testifies that the Book of Mormon is scripture. I don't recall the passage he began with, but he quoted a passage from the New Testament, saying that this referred to the Book of Mormon. I asked him how a book or letter written in the first century could be referencing a book written in the 1830s. Besides, when I looked up and read the passage it wasn't saying any such thing. He said that that was a valid question and proceeded to have me read Ezekiel 37:15-20

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 become one in thine hand. And when the children of thy people shall speak unto thee, saying, Wilt thou not shew 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 fellows, and will put them with him, even with the stick of Judah, and make them one stick, and they shall be one in mine hand. And the sticks whereon thou writest shall be in thine hand before their eyes.

- Ezekiel 37:15-20

He then proceeded to tell me that the stick of Judah was the Bible and the stick of Joseph was the Book of Mormon. This was the first I had heard of this idea, and it was an outrage.

Before I go further, I think that these earnest young men were deluded and misled by their instructors. After all, the LDS have been teaching this twisted interpretation of Ezekiel for at least 30 years, although I wasn't aware of that as we were conversing:

I give you my testimony of this Joseph, the Prophet of the Restoration. I know that he was a prophet of God. Of course this record that he was to bring forth to bring the Lord's people unto salvation is the Book of Mormon. Ezekiel, the exile prophet, foresaw the coming forth in the latter days of this book of scripture that had slept in the dust. He referred to it as the stick of Joseph. He foretold that the Saints of the latter days would combine it with the ancient stick of Judah, the Bible, and that the two would become one in their hand.

- BYU Speeches "The Stick of Joseph and the Stick of Judah" Bruce L. Brown, July 22, 1986.

So "latter day saints" have been teaching this for at least 30 years. Unlike Bruce L. Brown I believe that Joseph Smith was a *false* prophet, based on not just one, but two of his failed prophecies. I no more believe that Ezekiel was saying that this "stick of Joseph" was referring prophetically to Joseph Smith's alleged translation of the Book of Mormon than that there is a Mormon Temple in Jackson Missouri built during the earthly lifetime of anyone alive in 1832, or that a dead man (David W. Patten, who died on October 25, 1838) went on a mission with Joseph Smith in the spring of 1839, both of which Joseph Smith had prophesied would happen. We know what Moses gave as the test of a prophet, and we know what the punishment for a false prophet is, as well as the punishment for those who listen to them.

The test of a false prophet:

And if thou say in thine heart, How shall we know the word which the Lord hath not spoken? when a prophet speaketh in the name of the Lord, if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the thing which the Lord hath not spoken, but the prophet hath spoken it presumptuously: thou shalt not be afraid of him.

- Deuteronomy 18:21-22 (AKJV)

Another test:

If there arise among you a prophet, or a dreamer of dreams, and giveth thee a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder come to pass, whereof he spake unto thee, saying,

Let us go after other gods, which thou hast not known, and let us serve them; thou shalt not hearken unto the words of that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams: for the Lord your God proveth you, to know whether ye love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul.

- Deuteronomy 13:1-3 (AKJV)

The punishment for a false prophet:

And that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams, shall be put to death; because he hath spoken to turn you away from the Lord your God, which brought you out of the land of Egypt, and redeemed you out of the house of bondage, to thrust thee out of the way which the Lord thy God commanded thee to walk in. So shalt thou put the evil away from the midst of thee.

- Deuteronomy 13:5 (AKJV)

And, the punishment for those who listen to or seek after a false prophet:

And they shall bear the punishment of their iniquity: the punishment of the prophet shall be even as the punishment of him that seeketh unto him; that the house of Israel may go no more astray from me, neither be polluted any more with all their transgressions; but that they may be my people, and I may be their God, saith the Lord God.

- Ezekiel 14:10-11 (AKJV)

Isn't it interesting that *The very same prophet* that the "latter day saints" rely upon for their spurious claim that the stick of Joseph refers to the Book of Mormon declares the punishment for those who heed a false prophet?

Worse still, *in this very same speech*, Bruce L. Brown said:

In Mormon Doctrine, Elder Bruce R. McConkie spoke of two gospels, both of them true:

Two true gospels are spoken of in the revelations and have been revealed to men as occasions have warranted; one is the fullness of the everlasting gospel, the other is the preparatory gospel. [MD, p. 333]

Need I remind you yet again of the words of the apostle Paul in Galatians regarding "another gospel? In any case, I did not learn about these teachings in any detail until *after* these young men left my home.

"The Stick of Joseph is the Book of Mormon"? As I said earlier, this was the first I had heard of this teaching, and I was outraged. I told them not to try that with me, that that was a *false* interpretation of that scripture. The idea that the Joseph in "the stick of Joseph"

referred to Joseph Smith was a horrendous twisting of the plain words of the passage and I told them so.

I've said before that reading scripture in context is important. That's no less true here. Ezekiel himself puts the lie to the words of the "latter day saints". He says:

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: neither shall they defile themselves any more with their idols, nor with their detestable things, nor with any of their transgressions: but I will save them out of all their dwellingplaces, wherein they have sinned, and will cleanse them: so shall they be my people, and I will be their God. And David my servant shall be king over them; and they all shall have one shepherd: they shall also walk in my judgments, and observe my statutes, and do them. And they shall dwell in the land that I have given unto Jacob my servant, wherein your fathers have dwelt; and they shall dwell therein, even they, and their children, and their children's children for ever: and my servant David shall be their prince for ever.

- Ezekiel 37:20-25 (AKJV)

Recall the words of Mr. Brown above. He recognized Ezekiel as "the exile prophet". What this means is that Ezekiel' ministry took place during the Babylonian captivity of Judah. In fact the Book of Ezekiel begins during the fifth day of the fourth month of the fifth year of Jehoiachin's captivity.

Here in chapter 37 verses 20 through 25 he says "I will take the children of Israel from among the heathen, whither they be gone, and will make them one nation in the land upon the mountains of Israel". This comes as a declaration of the Lord to Israel while the two sticks are in his hand. It's clear that the two sticks were symbols, not of the Bible and the Book of Mormon, but of the ten tribes of Israel, and the tribes of Judah and Benjamin. When the Lord says through Ezekiel "neither shall they be divided into two kingdoms any more at all" it is clear that *this* is what the joining of the two sticks is referring to.

I proceeded to give a somewhat truncated history of the divided kingdom, starting with the sin of Solomon, and God's tearing Israel into two kingdoms under his son Rehoboam and under Jereboam the son of Nebat. The tribe of Judah and the tribe of Benjamin became known as the nation of Judah under Rehoboam, while the tribes of *Joseph*, that is Ephraim and Mannassah, together with Reuben, Simeon, Dan, Naphtali, Gad, Asher, Issachar, and Zebulun became known as the nation of Israel, or as some have called it, Ephraim, since Jereboam was from the tribe of Ephraim. The tribe of Ephraim is also called the tribe of

Joseph. So the stick of Judah (the stick upon which Ezekiel wrote “For the tribe of Judah, and the children of Israel his companions”) represents not the Bible, but the tribes of Judah and Benjamin, while the stick of Joseph (the stick upon which Ezekiel wrote “For Joseph, the stick of Ephraim, and for all the house of Israel his companions”) refers not to the Book of Mormon, but the tribes of Reuben, Simeon, Dan, Naphtali, Gad, Asher, Issachar, Zebulon, Mannassah, and Ephraim. The tribe of Levi wasn’t given an inheritance in the promised land, the Lord was their inheritance, and they could be found in both the northern kingdom and the southern kingdom, so both sticks included them.

This is not a prophecy speaking of the Book of Mormon in any sense. It is instead a prophecy of the reuniting of the divided kingdom under the “son of David”, the Messiah, Christ Jesus. After correcting this grossly twisted misinterpretation of the Bible we continued our discussion, with the warning that if they continued to misinterpret the Bible I would continue to call them out on it.

Our discussion moved back to the question of works and faith, but we quickly ran out of time. They promised to come back in two weeks, and I told them that it was clear that we say many of the same words, but that we also quite clearly have different meanings for those words. We’ll serve them lunch, and with the Lord’s help a good healthy serving of the **one true** gospel.

This was an exhausting session with these Mormon missionaries, but I learned a couple of very useful lessons from it. First, the Mormon Church appears to believe that most people, including Christians are ignorant of the Bible, and they will do their worst to exploit that perceived ignorance. From the reactions of these last two that have come to my door, they keep their own ignorant of the Bible as well.

The second, important lesson I learned is that those seemingly tedious and dry passages of the Bible are much more important than I realized. The adult Sunday school class that I attend, and very occasionally teach, has been studying 1 Kings and 2 Kings for quite some time now. After months and months of study of the history of the Kings of Judah and Israel a practical application to evangelism appeared to me Saturday. The Lord had prepared me, and he used that preparation to plant the seeds of doubt regarding the false gospel(s) of Mormonism into the hearts and minds of two of their missionaries.

Better still, I had, and it seems will continue to have the opportunity to share the true gospel with them. It’s my prayer that through my efforts and the efforts of others that these earnest young men might come to know the real Jesus, repent and confess their sin to him and by grace, through faith in him alone enter into his kingdom.