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The Stick of Judah and the Stick of Joseph, Part III: How Do the Sticks Become One?

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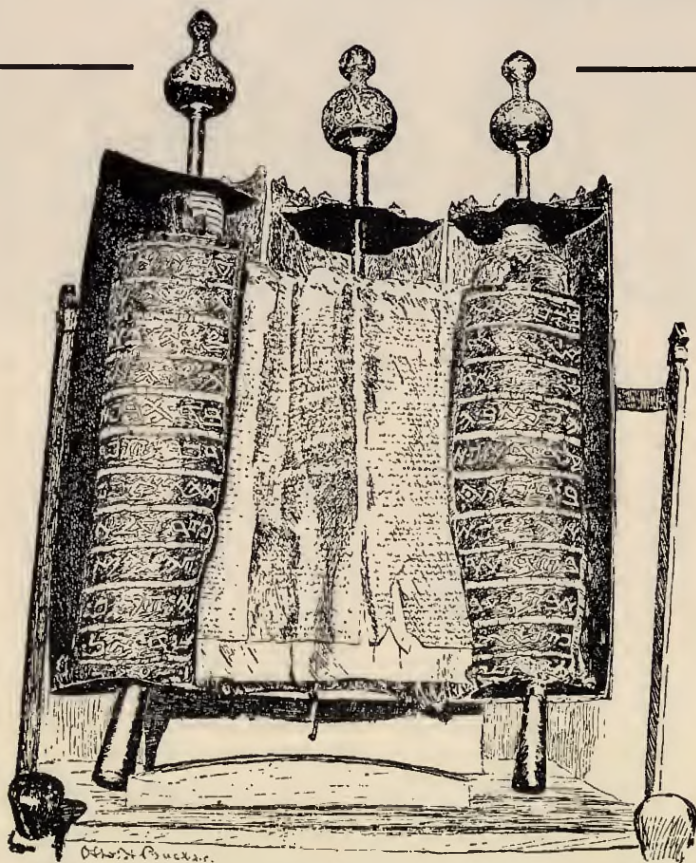
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Abstract: This series discusses how writing on tally sticks is related to Ezekiel 37 and the meaning of the prophecy that two sticks shall become one. The author offers extensive commentary on the traditional interpretations given to Ezekiel 37. The third part addresses the question of how the sticks become one.

The Stick of JUDAH and the Stick of JOSEPH — Part III

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The Roll of the Law. Palestine.

HOW DO THE STICKS BECOME ONE?

THE PROPHET is very emphatic on one point: No matter how many sticks there were originally, they become one in the hand of the Lord—"And bring them together to thee for one stick . . . and they shall become one stick, and shall be one in my hand." What is the strange manipulation by which one and one make one? We are reminded of the miraculous rod of Aaron that ate up the wooden rods of Pharaoh's priests and still became no larger,⁶⁶ but a far more practical explanation is at

hand. First of all, there is, of course, the binding of the sticks into a ritual bundle, by which the many become one: Ezekiel duly explains that as the sticks become one so "I will make them one nation." The Septuagint of Ezek. 17:7 reads, "and thou shalt fit them together for thyself, into a single staff of tying themselves, and they shall be one in thy hand." The Greek is as bad as the English, but it is clear that the staves become one by being fitted together first (*synapseis*), and then held fast by tying (*tou desai*). We have already had occasion to note the ritual tying of the bundle; what interests us here is

the *fitting together*, on which Ezekiel lays peculiar stress.

We have noted the Jewish tradition that all the tribal rods were originally cut from a single staff, and that ancient commentators remind us that the rods naturally belong together because they were all shoots from a single stock.⁶⁷ Both in the Old World and the New, divination and identification rods "in their original form consist of *split* arrow shaftments, and are marked both inside and out with bands of ribbonings."⁶⁸ What is behind this splitting and rejoining of the stick may be best explained by the example of the ancient institution of *tally sticks*.

A tally, to follow the definition of the principal authority on the subject, is "a stick notched and split through the notches, so that both parties to a transaction may have a part of the record."⁶⁹ In the ancient world, according to the same source, "the tally-stick, split or unsplit, is widely used: instances of it have been noted all over England and Europe, indeed all over the world, and in all kinds of trades."⁷⁰ In England, where tallies may best be studied, their use was required in all business transactions with the royal exchequer from the twelfth century (though they are much older) to the nineteenth, when their place was taken by paper bills and indentures, though the word "bill," meaning a stick of wood, still recalls their use,⁷¹ as does *indenture*, meaning a dent in the wood. A rod of hazelwood or willow was cut according to strictly prescribed rules into two parts, one with a notch on the end called a *stock*, the smaller piece being the *foil*.⁷² "The stock

went with the payer, the accountant; the exchequer kept the foil.⁷² Being cut with scratches and notches *before* the parts of the stick were separated, the tally furnished a foolproof control over both parties, for no two pieces of wood in the world would fit together perfectly to match mark for mark and grain for grain unless at their original marking they were *one stick*. When in 1297 one William de Brochouse tried to cheat the king's treasury by adding a notch to his half of the wood, he was promptly detected and sent to prison.⁷³ The fact that both parties held parts of the tally is fundamental, "implying a check on both rather than a debit on one."⁷⁴ Thus while the king held his half as a *foil* on any attempt to cheat him, the other party held the *stock* (stick) by which he could prove his exact status in the contract: from this the word *stock* is still retained in the business world,⁷⁵ while the old expression "lot and scot" betrays the original role of the arrow shaft in the transmission of property.⁷⁵

The great advantage of the tally-stick was that it gave parties to a contract a sure means of identification and an authoritative claim upon each other no matter how many miles or how many years might separate them. When, however, the final payment was made and all the terms of the contract fulfilled, the two pieces were joined together at the exchequer, tied as one, and laid up forever in the vaults of the royal building—becoming as it were "one in the king's hand."⁷⁶ So great was the heap of such sticks in the basement of the old Houses of Parliament, that when they were ordered burned the ensuing conflagration, "according to the well-known story . . . caused the fire which destroyed the Houses of Parliament in 1834."⁷⁷ At any rate "the exchequer exacted a return of the stock at audit," and only when the sticks had been united as one was the standing of the debtor cleared.⁷⁶

The analogy with Ezekiel's story of the sticks is at once apparent. But was the system of tallies really ancient, and did the Jews have them? It is interesting in this regard to note that all exchequer tallies had to be written on in Latin, the official language of the state, with the notable exception of an important class of tallies in which the names, dates, places, etc., are noted down in



Tally Sticks. The shorter sticks are the "stocks," and the larger ones the "foils" to which the stocks were fitted to "become one stick."
(Reproduced from "Archaeologia" Vol. 74 (1925), Plate lxxv.)

Hebrew, while the Jewish Plea Roll furnishes the best evidence for the use of private tallies.⁷⁸ Now though a great deal of tally-business was carried on between the king and foreign parties (e.g. the great Flemish merchant Henry Cade), the only foreign language found on the tallies is Hebrew. Not even English is allowed.⁷⁹ Had the Jews adopted tallies for the first time when the government did, they would like everybody else have been required to adopt the official method of marking them; so the remarkable exception made in their case, persecuted and unpopular as they were, certainly implies that they had their own tradition of tally marking, which they were allowed to retain.

In this respect, it is strange that the commentators while consistently identifying the sticks of Ezekiel 37 with tribal rods, never refer to the cutting of the rods in Zechariah 11.⁸⁰ We have noted that the *breaking* of a rod signifies in Jerusalem and Ezekiel the destruction of a nation; but the *cutting* of a rod has quite another symbolism. Thus Zechariah 11:10: "And I took my staff, even Beauty, and cut it asunder, that I might break my covenant* which I had made with all the people . . . v. 14: ". . . then I cut asunder mine

other staff, even Bands, that I might break the brotherhood between Judah and Israel." When the rod is cut in two, instead of being broken, Judah and Israel are not destroyed but separated; the bond that binds them together (and that is the meaning of the strange name *Bands*) is loosened, and the two go their separate ways. As the tie between nations is broken, so the mightier bond between God and men, the staff Beauty, is broken when the staff is "cut in two." This is the obvious reversal of the process of bringing the two divided sticks together, as described by Ezekiel, to renew the very covenants here broken—those between Judah and Israel, and those between God and "all the people." The technique of the tally-stick as a means of establishing a covenant and bringing parties together in normal contract is here plainly indicated.

We need not establish the antiquity of the tally-stick by working back through the records of the Middle Ages, for the institution is met fully developed in the earliest records of antiquity. This may be illustrated by the archaic feasting-tickets of the Greeks and Romans. Originally little rods, these tokens, which everyone had to present for admission to the great public feasts, took various forms and went by the name of *tesserae*. In

(Continued on following page)

* (Italics author's)

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(To be concluded)

The Stick of Judah and the Stick of Joseph

(Continued from page 152)

simplifies this to the bare names of "Judah" and "Joseph."⁹⁰ But such a rendering completely ignores the preposition *l-*, "to" or "for," which precedes the names of Joseph and Judah every time the writing is mentioned: "take a staff of wood and write on it *for* Judah," etc.⁹¹ The *l-* means that Ezekiel was not to write simply "Joseph" or "Judah" on the stick, but that he was to write something to or for them. It was to be a writing that somehow concerned them. No more obvious means of connecting Joseph and Judah with the sticks could be imagined, of course, than that of simply putting their names on the wood. But that is just the point: why in such an obvious situation does Ezekiel not do the obvious thing and put the names on the sticks? That is the way it was normally done: "write thou every man's name upon his rod," "write the Ineffable Name upon it," "write thy name upon it," etc. But what Ezekiel writes on the rods is not "Joseph" or "Judah," but "for Joseph" and "for Judah," or, according to some interpreters, "Joseph's" and "Judah's." The wide variety of translations shows that we are not concerned here with a mere writing of names. Property is not marked this way: Names found on ancient seals are in the nominative case, not in

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The Stick of Judah and the Stick of Joseph

(Continued from preceding page)

the genitive. When Kautzsch wants to make it appear that the names of Joseph and the others were actually written on the rods, he must render the inscription in the nominative, which Ezekiel conspicuously avoids. Hebrew uses no quotation marks, and so when the text reads "write on the wood for Joseph," it should be left as it stands, for when we introduce our own punctuation and translate, "write on wood, 'For Joseph'" we are employing a type of inscription that was used to dedicate votive offerings to deities but not to denote possession.⁹² Ezekiel tells us of a writing for Judah and another for Joseph, both writings to perform certain important functions; but he does not, as some suppose, give us the text of the writings.

However eloquent or informative the single rod or staff may have been, it presented serious limitations of space when a lengthy communication was in order. The obvious solution to this problem was simply to add more rods, and it is in this multiplication of sticks to form a ritual bundle that Culin sees the origin of the book in some parts of the world. "The ancestry of the book in Eastern Asia," he says, "may be traced, not only to the engraved strips of bamboo (Chinese *ch'ak*), but, in the opinion of the writer, to the bundle of engraved or painted arrow-derived slips used in divination. The folding fan of China and Japan is not unlikely to have originated from these *tanzaku* or writing slips, which the nobles carried in order to make memoranda when in the presence of the sovereign."⁹³ The Orientals would cut a piece of wood into strips notched on the sides like tally-sticks, which could be "fanned out" to present a larger writing surface, and when not in use folded together perfectly to make "one stick" in the hand of the nobleman who inscribed upon them the words of majesty. The method recalls the legendary cutting of the twelve rods of Israel from a single stock, but more important is the use of the bundle of twelve rods to determine the fortunes of the nations. These tribal bundles of which we spoke above, were always used as books of divination from which the past and present and fu-

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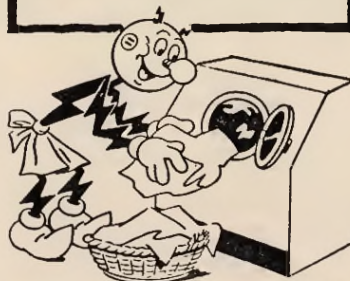
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ture history of the people was determined. As census-books they made up a "Book of Life" "opened at the foundation of the world" to tell the history of the coming age: if one's name were missing from this book, he was "cut off from among the people" and had no part in the life of the race.⁹⁴ The modern card deck is derived from a bundle of tribal rods, fifty-two in number, used in divination all over the world: Individually each token has a message; together they make up a book which is read by the adept with as much confidence as if it were in writing.⁹⁵ It is thus quite possible for the staves of "Judah and his associates," as well as "Joseph and his associates" to represent books containing the census and history of these nations.

Sticks and Scrolls:—When a rod or staff serves as a token of authority and identification, it is important

WEATHER RETORT

By Leonard K. Schiff

Somehow I can't be debonair

*When, after battling snow and sleet,
I'm greeted with an icy stare*

And asked if I have wiped my feet.

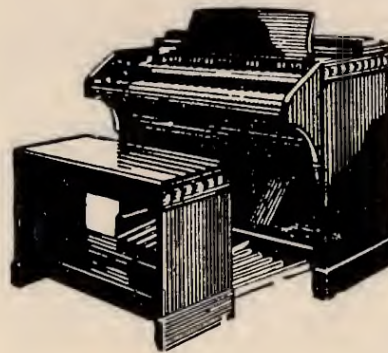
that no copy or duplicate of it be allowed to circulate.⁹⁶ In that case the multiplication of message-staffs is impossible. What is to be done if a longer message is to be sent? This problem and its solution are actually met in the ancient North, where only *one* royal summons-arrow was legal, and no others could be cut.⁹⁷ To make room for a long message, a piece of parchment was attached to the staff and was rolled around it.⁹⁸ To this day in Tibet the summons-arrow is sent out exactly as it once was among our northern ancestors: "A mobilization order is sent on a piece of red cloth attached to an arrow. The arrow is dispatched by a special rider who gallops to the nearest headman and hands it over to him. The headman takes note of the contents of the order and immediately dispatches a fresh rider to another headman."⁹⁹ On festival assembly days the ancient Japanese warriors would bind strips of holy

(Continued on following page)

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(Continued from preceding page)

paper bearing written texts on their arrows, "inscribed sacred paper for the gods."¹⁰⁰ The Ojibwa may substitute for the painted rod or arrow shaft, that serves as an invitation-stick "a piece of birch-bark bearing characters."¹⁰¹ Here we have a natural scroll, as anyone who has tried to write on tough, curling birch-bark can attest, and we are reminded that the word *birch* is closely related to *beech*, *box*, and *book*, and also

that *liber* originally meant *bast* or *bark*.

Whether the ancient scroll originated in one or many places, its attachment to a *stick* certainly betrays its origin; for the stick is by no means necessary to a scroll—it is in fact an inconvenience, used by the ancients only in ritual and very valuable literary text, a quaint, old-fashioned survival.¹⁰²

Latter-day Saints often interpret the word *stick* in Ezekiel 37 to refer to

the stick or rod around which a scroll was wrapped. The interpretation is perfectly possible. As Gregory the Great observed long ago, the Hebrew word *etz* wood can mean almost anything in the Old Testament, depending entirely on the context in which it is used.¹⁰³ Sometimes *etz* must be translated as *tree*, sometimes as *branch*, *image*, *musical instrument*, *framework*, *idol*, *house*, *ax*, *plow*, *spear*, *beam*, *stalk of flax* (!) *rod*, *gallows*, etc., etc.¹⁰⁴ When one tills with wood, it is rendered not *wood* but *plow*; when one plays music on it, it is no longer mere wood, but an *instrument*; when one worships, it is an *idol*, and so forth. Now what is the specific use to which the wood is put in Ezekiel 37? It is used, as Keil insists, to be written on, and for that purpose only. It is hence not surprising that the early Jewish commentators on the passage rendered *wood* here as *tablet*, but Keil cannot accept this because the sticks in Ezekiel are not treated at all as tablets would be. On the other hand, Keil finds it very significant that the prophet deliberately avoids calling the sticks *rods* or *staves*, as if that, too, would give the wrong impression.¹⁰⁵ How can a *stick* be a *book*?

(To be continued)

REFERENCES

¹⁰⁰Ginzberg, *op. cit.*, III, 335.

¹⁰¹Medieval commentators unite everything in the Rod of Aaron: Mary is the Rod of Aaron (*PL* CXLIV, 721, 760; CLXV, 883), the flowering rod from the root of Jesse (Tertullian, *PL* II, 788); Christ is also the Rod of Aaron (*PL* CXLIV, 730), as well as the Rod of Moses (*PL* CLXXI, 686; CXCIV, 1061). The rod of Moses represents the Cross of Christ and his power (*PL* CLXVII, 641). It represents also the congregation of the righteous (*PL* CXII, 1081), and even the whole human race (*PL* CXCI, 684). The blossoming rod is the humanity of Christ, who is the blossom on the rod from the root of Jesse (*PL* CLXVII, 584). The rod is naturally the symbol of divine judgment (*PL* CLXX, 339) and of dominion (*L*, 738).

¹⁰²S. Culin, *Games of the North American Indians* (Washington, 1907), p. 46.

¹⁰³Hilary Jenkinson, "Exchequer Tallies," *Archaeologia* LXII (1911), p. 367.

¹⁰⁴*Ibid.*, p. 386.

¹⁰⁵H. Jenkinson, "Medieval Tallies, Public and Private," *Archaeologia* 74 (1924), p. 305.

¹⁰⁶Jenkinson, *op. cit.*, 1911, pp. 373f, 370. The foil is sometimes called the *contra-tallia*, the counter-tally, p. 374.

¹⁰⁷*Ibid.*, p. 374.

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⁷⁴Jenkinson, *op. cit.*, 1924, p. 318.

⁷⁵*Ibid.*, p. 292; on "lot and scot," Nibley, *op. cit.*, pp. 331f, 334, where the technical term for marking an arrow (*skera ör upp*) is the same as that for marking tallies, Jenkinson, *loc. cit.* The length of the tallies is determined exactly as the Indians determine the length of gaming-sticks cut from arrow shafts, by measuring from the tip of the forefinger to the tip of the extended thumb.

⁷⁶Jenkinson, *op. cit.*, 1911, p. 374; 1924, p. 315.

⁷⁷*Idem*, 1911, p. 369. So complete was the destruction that all knowledge of the institution of tally-cutting was completely lost in England after the fire, *ibid.*, p. 371.

⁷⁸*Idem*, 1911, p. 378; 1924, pp. 313f, 293.

⁷⁹Of all the surviving tallies, only two bear writing in English, *idem*, 1924, p. 314.

⁸⁰The one exception is G. A. Cooke, *Book of Ezek.*, p. 400: "The symbol evidently made a lasting impression, for it is imitated in Zechariah 11:7, where, however, the two staves (a different word) are given names but not inscribed."

⁸¹The operation has been studied by Theod. Mommsen, *Römische Forschungen* (1864) I, 338-348, and in the *Historische Zeitschrift* I, 339-342, cited by Nibley in the *Classical Journal* XL (1945), p. 538.

⁸²Nibley, *op. cit.*, pp. 537f. The oldest known symbolon was the messenger-staff given by Apollo to his missionary Abaris; Abaris used it as a feasting ticket and sign of authority wherever he went, Nibley *Wst. Pol. Qt.* II, p. 332.

⁸³"It is the arrow of the *summus deus*, held on loan by an earthly king as a gage of divine support, that everywhere gives the latter his earthly power and authority," Nibley, *op. cit.*, p. 334.

⁸⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 338f.

⁸⁵See *Oxford Dictionary*, article "book."

⁸⁶Frd. Blass, in Ivan von Mueller's *Handbuch der kl. Altertumswissenschaft* (Munich, 1892), Vol. I, 334: "In Italien muss in alter Zeit vielfach auf Bast geschrieben sein, da das Wort liber noch bei Vergil dies bedeutet. . . . Der Gebrauch des Holzes aber ist in beiden Laendern alt. Im Lateinischen stammt daher das Wort codex = caudex."

⁸⁷Freeman, *Handbook of Bible Manners*, etc., No. 583.

⁸⁸Ginzberg, *Legends*, etc., VI, 54.

⁸⁹*Ibid.*, III, 19.

⁹⁰"The prophet is . . . to inscribe one with the name Judah, and the other with the name Joseph," p. 400.

⁹¹"For Judah . . . his companions.' The stick, emblem of the royal sceptre, was to be inscribed with those words." Fisch, *Ezekiel*, p. 249.

⁹²Numerous examples of seal inscriptions and dedications may be found in A. Deimel, *Sumerische Grammatik* (Rome, 1924), and in H. Frankfor, *Cylinder Seals* (London: Macmillan, 1939). Publications of collected Oriental seals are very numerous.

⁹³S. Culin, in *National Museum Rept.*, 1896, p. 887.

⁹⁴Nibley, *Class. Jnl.* 40 (1945), 536ff.

⁹⁵Nibley, *Wst. Pol. Quart.* II, 337. Even

in Egypt the 52 arrow shafts of divination "drifted down to the vulgarity of playing-cards," according to W. M. F. Petrie, *Scarabs and Cylinders with Names*, etc. (Univ. of London, 1917), p. 4.

⁹⁶W. H. Ward, *The Seal Cylinders of Western Asia* (Washington, 1910), pp. 3ff.

⁹⁷The only time that two arrows were sent was when one (a wooden shaft) went by land and the other (of iron) by sea, according to Q. Weinhold, in *Sitzungsbericht d. Akad. d. Wiss. zu Berlin* 1891 (Phil.-Hist. Kl.) XXIX, p. 536.

⁹⁸*Ibid.*, p. 548.

⁹⁹G. N. Roerich, *Trails to Inmost Asia* (Yale Univ., 1931), p. 352.

¹⁰⁰*Japanische Volksmärchen* (Jena: Die-derich, 1938), p. 43; see my note on documents of this type, *Wst. Pol. Qt.* II, 342, n. 80.

¹⁰¹G. Mallery, "Picture-writing of the American Indians," *Bur. Ethnol. Rept.* X (1888-9), 367, fig. 375.

¹⁰²Blass, in von Mueller's *Handb. d. Aw.*, I, 335. The first genuine ancient scrolls ever to be discovered intact are the Dead Sea scrolls, none of which have sticks to them.

¹⁰³In *Patrol. Lat.* LXXV, p. 394.

¹⁰⁴Zorell, *Lexicon*, p. 618.

¹⁰⁵Keil, *Commentary on Ezekiel* II, 130.

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