



Type: Magazine Article

---

## The Stick of Judah and the Stick of Joseph, Part IV

Author(s): Hugh W. Nibley

Source: *Improvement Era*, Vol. 56, No. 4 (April 1953)

Published by: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

Page(s): 250, 266–267

---

**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 fourth part argues that the sticks refer to scroll-holders.

# The Stick of JUDAH and the Stick of JOSEPH

## Part IV

by Hugh Nibley, Ph.D.

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR, HISTORY AND RELIGION,  
BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY

THE sticks around which the scrolls of the law were rolled were always regarded as holy and treated as scepters.<sup>106</sup> It will be recalled that nearly all commentators point out that the sticks of Ezekiel are in some way or other scepters. The scrolls of the Law were used by the kings of Judah as other kings used scepters, being "kept near his throne and carried into battle."<sup>107</sup> "The scroll itself," we are told, "is girded with a strip of silk and robed in a Mantle of the Law," while the wooden rod had a crown on its upper end, like the mace or scepter of a king. "Some scrolls," says the Jewish *Encyclopedia*, "have two crowns, one for each upper end."<sup>107</sup> These honors show the Jewish scrolls of the Law are the same given to the royal herald's-staff or scepter in other parts of the world. "At the feast of the Oschophoria," at Athens, for example, "the herald's staff was crowned with garlands, but not the herald himself."<sup>108</sup> As in the ancient North, "the staff was a willow bough always cut from a living tree, and was never allowed to wither or dry up"—which exactly recalls the blossoming rod of Aaron, which withered when Israel fell from grace.<sup>108</sup> Among our Norse ancestors this rod was taken from place to place, and at each place to which it

went, a roll-call was taken and a notch cut on the rod, which was the king's own staff. "The king was represented by the bailiff of the Hundred carrying a ward-staff. It was the staff (not the bailiff) which represented majesty and received the honours."<sup>108</sup>

The peculiar honors bestowed upon the sticks of the Jewish Law-scrolls show by their nature that the sticks themselves were regarded originally as the bearers of the law. But once parchment had been rolled around these sticks (and the antiquity of this custom may be surmised from the fact that all official scrolls of the Law should be on the skin of *wild* beasts),<sup>109</sup> could they still be brought together like tallies to make one stick? The accompanying illustration shows an actual application of this idea: to an edict of the Empress Wu, her successor, the Emperor Tai Tsung (763-779 A.D.) wished to add a supplement of his own, incorporating it in the original law. The two rolls, each with one stick in it, are here seen placed side by side and bound

The two rolls, each with one stick in it, are here seen placed side by side and bound together as one by a silken cloth, just as the roll of the Jewish Law with its two sticks is "girded with a strip of silk."  
(After J. Lechler, *Vom Hakenkreuz* [Leipzig, 1934], p. 74.)

together as one by a silken cloth, just as the roll of the Jewish Law with its two sticks is "girded with a strip of silk" when it is rolled up to be put into the tabernacle.<sup>110</sup> There are two rolls having different designs on them and of different colors, showing that originally the scrolls do not have two sticks to them, but only one apiece.<sup>110</sup> This suggests the origin of the scroll in the single message-stick with the message-scroll wrapped around it, as well as the probability that in Ezekiel's day the scrolls were still of the primitive one-shaft variety. That the scroll-sticks of the Greeks and Romans were derived from message-arrows is indicated by a number of things. Instead of having convenient handles at the bottom and smooth knobs at the top, the roll-sticks had points at both ends which made them resemble the well-known double-headed thunderbolt, the scepter of Zeus and the best-known of all rods of office.<sup>111</sup> That the resemblance is not accidental appears not only in the impractical arrangement of the thing and the identification of scroll-rods with scepters, but likewise in the name given to the points, *koronis*, Latin, *cornua*, usually explained as referring to the shape of the sharpened ends. But these do not resemble horns, and the name probably has the same origin as that of the little arrow-marks often used in the marking of scrolls by their makers, called *ceraunia*, "little thunderbolts."<sup>111</sup>

We have seen that the heroes of Israel identified themselves as emissaries of the Most High by bearing his rod before the eyes of those to whom they were sent, Jew or Gentile. In this connection the rod is also interchangeable with the scroll, for in the Middle Ages every Jew was required by Jewish law to carry a scroll of the Law with him at all

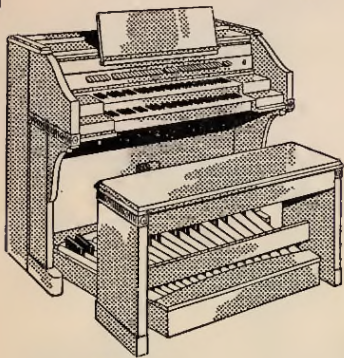
(Continued on page 267)





Give your  
church

America's  
Finest  
Electronic Organ



Connsonata

Connsonata offers amazing performance and thrilling tone, wide selection of solo "voices" and rich, full organ effects. Come to Daynes Music and see it . . . hear it . . . compare it! . . . at no obligation. Find out why more and more people are buying Connsonata after trying all the rest.

Daynes Music

Company

45-47 SOUTH MAIN

Salt Lake City

145 NORTH UNIVERSITY, PROVO 2260 WASHINGTON BLVD., OGDEN

### TO WARD BISHOPS

A talented group of Hawaiian musicians will leave Hawaii June 15th to tour the intermountain region.

If you need a good show to boost your ward building fund this group might be available to you. For information on rates and schedule write to

L. E. Clissold

56 South Main St.  
Salt Lake City, Utah

## THE STICK OF JUDAH AND THE STICK OF JOSEPH

(Continued from page 250)

times as his identification and passport.<sup>112</sup> The connection between staff and book is here not far to seek—the staff is a mark and token, symbolizing that by which the Jew is known to the world; the scroll is a step closer to home—it is almost the thing itself. The scripture, says Clement of Alexandria in an eloquent

discourse on the subject, is the rod by which God teaches his people.<sup>113</sup> The double function of the rod, says Gregory of Nyssen, is that of consolation and direction, which are the offices of the scripture for all believers.<sup>114</sup> If the rod is the symbolic means by which Judah is identified and set apart from the rest of the world (and the use of such a

## Lost Intervals

Richard L. Evans

THERE are many circumstances and situations in which we may feel that we are marking time—or worse—wasting time. There are times when we are waiting for people and appointments when we feel cheated as we think of what we might have done with the time we waste in waiting. There are times of routine travel, of commuting between places when the interval may seem more or less lost. There are times when we are pressed into pursuits not of our own choosing, on detours from our intended destination—as for example time spent in making a living at uninteresting routine work, or while preparing for other pursuits, or time spent by young men in military service when they are eager to settle down to other purposes. In these unavoidable interruptions, on these side trips on side roads, there is often much more that can be salvaged than is sometimes supposed. Wherever a man is, he has his mind with him. Wherever he is, he can think and plan and pursue, in blueprint at least, constructive purposes. Almost wherever he is, he can arrange to read—not trash or trivia but from the best books. It isn't always so, but it can often be so. Almost wherever a man is, he can write. It takes only simple tools to write—and some significant writings have come even from within prison walls. Some interesting and profitable activities have been pursued from the bedsides of shut-ins, by those who couldn't go out from where they were but who have reached out with what they had, with some wonderfully useful results. A man may be immobilized without immobilizing his mind. Some of the most successful people have learned what to do with odd moments, with the in-between times that so many of us waste—sometimes just sitting, sometimes just waiting, sometimes with impatient pacing. Almost wherever a person is he can find some constructive purpose to pursue, without wasting time in shoddy or trivial or tawdry pursuits. In a sense we can't "save" time as we can save water that would otherwise run away. But often when we are diverted from our intended course, we can make time serve as water that runs into a reservoir—a reservoir of preparation, of stored knowledge, of acquired skills—to be used for a better purpose at a better time and place rather than let it run downstream at the wrong season.

"The Spoken Word" FROM TEMPLE SQUARE  
PRESENTED OVER KSL AND THE COLUMBIA BROADCASTING  
SYSTEM, FEBRUARY 1, 1953

Copyright, 1953



symbol was regarded by the early Christians as a thing of great significance and secrecy), what is the means by which Judah is actually thus distinguished, i.e., what is the real equivalent of the rod? It is the Bible, of course. In figurative language the Jews will recognize the Messiah by examining the rod; "search ye the scriptures," said the Lord, "for they it be that testify of me."

The identity of staff and scripture was noted by the earliest and best informed of the Christian historians. For the great Eusebius the sticks of Ezekiel represent the Old Testament and the New Testament.<sup>115</sup> A century and a half earlier Irenaeus speaks of the (hidden) meanings of the sticks as "hidden from us, for," he says, "since by the wood we rejected him, by the wood his greatness shall be made visible to everyone, and as one of our predecessors has said, by the holy reaching out of the hands the two people are led to one God. For there are two hands and two nations scattered to the ends of the earth. . . ."<sup>116</sup> There is every indication that the Saints of the early Church regarded the teaching of the sticks and the gathering as of great secrecy and great significance, the meaning of the whole thing being later lost.<sup>117</sup> The later Fathers took the usual allegorical liberties in dealing with Ezekiel 37.

(To be continued)

#### REFERENCES

- <sup>106</sup>Jewish Encyclopedia, s. v. scroll.  
<sup>107</sup>Ibid.  
<sup>108</sup>F. S. Burnell, "Staves and Sceptres," *Folklore* LIX (Dec. 1948), p. 165.  
<sup>109</sup>Jew. Encycl.  
<sup>110</sup>J. Lechler, *Vom Hakenkreuz* (Leipzig: Kabitzsch, 1934), p. 74, fig. 6.  
<sup>111</sup>F. Cabrol & H. Leclercq, *Dictionnaire d'Archeologie Chretienne et de Liturgie*.  
<sup>112</sup>Jewish Encl., loc. cit.  
<sup>113</sup>Clement Alex., *Paedog.* I, in *Patrol. Graec.* VIII, 324.  
<sup>114</sup>In *Patrol. Graec.* XLIV, 1031 and XLV, 1250.  
<sup>115</sup>Eusebius, *Demonstr. Evang.*, in *Patrol. Graec.* XXII, 745.  
<sup>116</sup>Irenaeus, in *Patrol. Graec.* VII, 1171.  
<sup>117</sup>Though modern critics fail to detect anything of great importance or mystery in the rods of identification, for the earliest writers of the Church they were regarded as objects of great symbolic significance, conveying a message of real, if hidden, importance: Migne, *Patrol. Graec.* VI, 681, n. 43.

APRIL 1953

East or South . . .

Ride the

Zephyrs

Extra comfort . . .

extra pleasure . . .

no extra fare!



**You travel relaxed, arrive refreshed.** Take your choice: sleeping cars with varied accommodations...or reclining-seat coaches. Distinctive dining cars . . . serving delicious meals.

#### DAILY SCHEDULES

- **The Vista-Dome California Zephyr** leaves Salt Lake City 5:40 am . . . arrives Denver 7:00 pm . . . arrives Chicago 1:30 pm
- **The famous Denver Zephyr** leaves Denver 4:00 pm . . . arrives Chicago 9:05 am. (Connecting service leaves Salt Lake City 5:30 pm.)
- **The Texas Zephyr** leaves Denver 12:01 pm . . . leaves Pueblo 2:31 pm . . . arrives Ft. Worth 6:00 am . . . arrives Dallas 7:15 am. (Connecting service leaves Salt Lake City 5:30 pm)

H. J. WALTHER, General Agent

218 Kearns Building  
 Phone: 22-5519  
 Salt Lake City, Utah



"BURNED OUT"

REALLY MEANS BURNED OUT TODAY

*A fire may mean you are out of a place to live, with tremendous added expense before you find another.*

*Let us explain your need for ample insurance to cover today's higher values.*

**UTAH HOME FIRE INSURANCE COMPANY**

HEBER J. GRANT & CO., General Agents, Salt Lake City