

WHAT IS THE MEANING OF EZEKIEL'S TWO STICKS?

Two verses in Ezekiel 37 are understood by some to prophesy a companion volume of scripture to the Bible. The verses at issue are:

16 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: 17 And join them one to another into one stick; and they shall become one in thine hand.

It is asserted by those who view this passage as predictive of extra-biblical scripture that "the stick of Judah" is actually a scroll, namely the Bible, and that the "stick of Joseph" is a separate scroll, another testament of Jesus Christ.

Valid interpretations of the Bible must pass at least four elementary tests. First, most texts are best understood in a normal or literal way. Figurative exceptions are typically obvious. Second, the Bible is to be interpreted historically. In other words, how would the original hearers or recipients have understood the message in their day? Third, good interpretations must be grammatically correct. Here we refer primarily to the original languages of scripture. Serious Biblical researchers frequently pore over the divinely preserved Old Testament Hebrew and New Testament Greek copies to determine their real meaning. Fourth, and this cannot be overstated, is the matter of context. Reading the verses immediately preceding and following a targeted text is often all that's needed. Seen more broadly, contextual interpretation considers entire chapters, books, or the Bible as a whole.

Applying these basic and recognized principles of Biblical interpretation, what is the meaning of Ezekiel's two sticks? First, notice what these verses literally say. He was to write specific words on two sticks and hold them in his hand. Second, we must ask, if there was any historical precedent or reason to assume such an object lesson had anything to do with the coming forth of scripture, ancient or modern, and the answer is absolutely none. Third, grammatically there are two distinct Hebrew words for stick and scroll. Ezekiel used the one for stick, not the one for scroll. Fourth, in this case the immediate context is especially helpful in understanding Ezekiel's illustration.

18 And when the children of thy people shall speak unto thee, saying, Wilt thou not shew us what thou *meanest* by these? . . .21 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: 22 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:

Since 931 B.C. Israel had been divided into a southern kingdom known as Judah and a northern kingdom known as Israel or Ephraim. Ezekiel's two sticks in one hand clearly pictured their coming regathering and reunification as a single nation, just as it says.