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Ezekiel's Sticks and the Gathering of Israel

By Keith Meservy

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Ezekiel's ancient prophecy of the two "sticks"—or books—does more than foresee the Bible and Book of Mormon. It marks the coming of the Book of Mormon as the beginning of the great latter-day gathering.

Many critics have long frowned upon the Latter-day Saint interpretation of *sticks* in Ezekiel's prophecy ([Ezek. 37:15–20](#)) as two books of scripture—the Bible and the Book of Mormon. They insist that sticks, either scrolls or tallies, do not make scriptures, and that, even if they do, Latter-day Saints are taking the prophecy out of context: chapter 37 as a whole discusses the gathering of Israel, not books of scripture. They suggest that *stick* really represents a *scepter*, a tribe or one of the divided kingdoms of Judah or Israel.

However, new light shed on ancient scribal practices by a Mesopotamian archaeological discovery sends us back to this fascinating prophecy for a closer look.

The Translation of *Stick*

A correct interpretation of this prophecy depends primarily on the meaning of the Hebrew word *'ets*, translated *stick* in the King James Version. Hebrew words, like words in any language, tend to have a general meaning as well as a variety of specific meanings, depending on their use.

In English, for instance, "Fire!" shouted on a rifle range means something different than "Fire!" shouted in a hotel. Idiomatic usage also affects meaning: "Have a heart," "won her heart," and "never lose heart" all use *heart* in different senses. In each instance, the context determines how the word is used and provides its meaning. The general meaning of *'ets* is *wood*, as Jewish translators of the Greek Septuagint showed in 259 translations out of 300 uses of *'ets*. *Stick* is merely one specific meaning used by King James translators; others include *tree*, *timber*, *helve*, *plank*, *stalk*, *staff*, *stock*, *gallows*. A tree isn't a plank, a plank isn't a gallows, and a gallows isn't a stick; but tree, plank, gallows, and stick are all wood. Context in each instance determines the way *'ets* is translated.

It makes no difference how Ezekiel used *'ets* elsewhere or how other writers in the Bible used it. We must look at Ezekiel's use of his wood (*'ets*) in chapter 37 ([Ezek. 37](#)) to determine its meaning.

Ezekiel *wrote* on his wood. (This writing on wood should not be confused with the writing on a *rod* in Numbers 17. [\[Num. 17\]](#) The tribal leaders in that passage wrote on rods or tribal staves, but the word *matteh* instead of *'ets* is used.) Since archaeologists know now that ancient Babylonians wrote on wood, this knowledge provides a valuable context within which to interpret the meaning of Ezekiel's action.

Babylonian Wax Writing Boards

At one time, Babylonian scribes were thought to write cuneiform texts only on soft clay tablets with a stylus. Their own tablets, however, tell us that sometimes they copied their texts from a *wooden tablet* (*is leu*). Since no archaeologist had ever found any of those wooden tablets, scholars wondered how cuneiform could have been written on them. Did scribes paint the characters on?

In 1948, as he read two ancient Babylonian texts, San Nicolo discovered that scribes were filling their wooden tablets with wax. He remembered that Greeks and Romans filled writing boards with wax and then wrote on their surfaces. Since Babylonians were filling boards with wax, he theorized that they must also have been using wax writing boards.¹

Five years later, archaeologist Max Mallowan discovered a set of sixteen hinged wax writing boards in Assyria that looked strikingly like Greek and Roman writing boards. The cuneiform inscription on the cover board identified it as an *is leu* (*wooden tablet*).



The discovery in 1953 of these writing boards from biblical Calah in Mesopotamia altered the thinking of scholars about how Middle Eastern cultures made records. Wooden tablets filled with wax represent the “earliest known form of ancient book” and help us understand an important prophecy of Ezekiel foretelling the uniting of the Bible and Book of Mormon.

Having this as a tangible example, scholars recognized many examples of writing boards in use on the bas-relief sculpture of Assyrian palaces.² (See illustration.) It became abundantly clear that a previously unknown method of making records was commonly used in ancient Mesopotamia.

Did Ezekiel Write on Wax Writing Boards?

From this it is also clear that Ezekiel and his fellow Jewish captives lived in a world where scribes typically wrote on wax writing boards. Since he tells us in chapter 37 that the Lord commanded him to take wood, or a board, and write upon it, we must ask: Did Ezekiel write on wax writing boards rather than on “sticks”?

When asking this question, we must remember that the primary meaning of *'ets* as *wood* is not subject to question, as third-century B.C. Jewish translators show. However, wood might be the tree or the woods growing on the hill, or the wood for building or burning, or the wood for making things like staves and staffs. Had Ezekiel used his *'ets* (*wood*) to build a house, a translator could have called his wood *building boards, beams, planks, siding, or roofing*. If he had planted, pruned, or burned his wood, a translator might have translated it as *trees, wood, sticks*. In fact, Ezekiel used *'ets* in a number of ways—in Ezekiel 15:1–5 [[Ezek. 15:1–5](#)] as *wood* for burning and in Ezekiel 31:3–18 [[Ezek. 31:3–18](#)] as growing *trees*.

By Ezekiel's action of writing on wood, however, a translator could translate the term as (*writing*) *board*. Even so, the evidence that writing boards were regularly used in Ezekiel's day is insufficient to show that writing board was exactly what Ezekiel was referring to. So we must look for corroboratory evidence.

Part of this evidence is found in verse 17 of Ezekiel 37, [[Ezek 37:17](#)] which tells us that, having written on his boards, Ezekiel joined “them one to another into one stick [board]” and they became one in his hand. This joining action was typical of scribes who wrote on boards. The delicate inner surfaces had to be protected from marring or scarring. By joining two boards together by thongs or metal hinges, a scribe could fold them together—and lo, two boards became one in his hand.

Corroborating evidence is also found in the statement that Ezekiel identified the owner of each board by

writing a cover inscription on it. Once again, he was doing what scribes normally did to their boards. Sargon, for example, put an inscription on the cover of his sixteen-board set to show that it belonged to him, what its contents were, and that it was placed in his palace at Dur-Sharrukin.^{[3](#)}

Ezekiel's inscriptions identified Judah and Joseph as the owners of each of the two boards. The Hebrew preposition *le* [to/for] in front of the names *Judah* and *Joseph* shows to whom each of these boards belonged. Thus, we might better translate the inscriptions to show this possession by putting the words "(belonging) to" before each name: "(Belonging) to Judah, and (belonging) to the children of Israel his companions," and "(Belonging) to Joseph, the [board] of Ephraim, and (belonging) to all the house of Israel his companions." ([Ezek. 37:16.](#))

Ezekiel's use of the wood, therefore, helps define the meaning of *wood* in this context. He was told to write on wood, join the two boards into one, and inscribe the names of the owners on the covers. These three simple but specific actions were typical of scribal procedures; in fact, all of them were peculiar to scribes who wrote on boards. Since Ezekiel's use of *wood* is the key to the word's specific meaning, and since what he was doing typified the technical actions of scribes who wrote on wax writing boards, Ezekiel most likely was writing on wax writing boards.

If the King James translators had known that Ezekiel lived among scribes who wrote on wood, they might have translated the "stick" passage differently. Here is how one modern translation, the New English Bible, translates Ezekiel 37:15–19: [\[Ezek. 37:15–19\]](#)

"These were the words of the Lord to me: Man, *take one leaf of a wooden tablet* and write on it, 'Judah and his associates of Israel.' Then take another leaf and write on it, 'Joseph, the leaf of Ephraim and all of his associates of Israel.' Now bring the two together to form one tablet; then they will be a folding tablet in your hand." At this point, Ezekiel emphasizes the ownership of the two tablets: "These are the words of the Lord God: I am taking the leaf of Joseph, *which belongs to Ephraim and his associate tribes of Israel, and joining it to the leaf of Judah.* Thus I shall make them one tablet." (Italics added.)

Could Ezekiel Have Used Wax Tablets?

One might ask, Could Hebrew or Aramaic characters be written efficiently upon wax surfaces? The question is perhaps irrelevant because Ezekiel seems to have made models, or visual aids, instead of authentic books. But even then, scholars agree that countless Aramaic documents must have been composed on wax tablets. (Aramaic was the language used by the Jews in Babylon.)

Leo Oppenheim, an Accadian scholar, suggests that "it is likely that Aramaic was written in this way before the Accadian scribes began to use it for cuneiform and that with the loss of these fragile books an entire literature in Aramaic may have perished in Mesopotamia."^{[4](#)}

Max Mallowan concludes that wax writing boards became popular in Mesopotamia because they were "conveniently portable and [could] contain long texts easily available for consultation. Moreover, deletions or additions could be made without difficulty." Clay tablets, on the other hand, were durable but took a great amount of storage space in proportion to what was written upon them, and they allowed no alterations once they had dried.^{[5](#)}

Have any Aramaic or Hebrew tablets been found? No. But two known examples of wooden tablets in the Assyrian language have survived—one made of wood and the other made of ivory. Furthermore, many cuneiform records refer to wooden tablets, and several bas-relief sculptures show that they were used extensively in Mesopotamia, in Hittite country, and in Zingirli, an Aramaic-speaking country.

This type of record-keeping was also widespread in Greece (from the time of Homer and Herodotus) and in Rome up to the time of medieval Europe. Such extensive use through hundreds of years of time among so many different nationalities and in so many different languages shows what a practical and popular method of writing it was.

Bar Rekub, a King of Zingirli, c. 740 B.C., shows us that Aramaic-speaking people were writing upon wax

boards. (See illustration.) We must assume that Jews in Babylonia regularly used writing boards, as their contemporaries did, to record transactions, historical events, and the like. One would be amazed if they didn't.

Indeed, Luke mentions that Zacharias "asked for a writing table, and wrote, saying, His name is John." ([Luke 1:63](#).) The writing table (Greek, *pinakidion*) was a wax writing board. Furthermore, in the pseudepigraphical work of Ezra IV, Ezra was commanded to prepare for himself "many writing-tablets" so he could record the books God would reveal to him (14:24), and Jewish children anciently learned to read by using wax tablets because parchment was too expensive. [6](#) Jews borrowed the Greek word for a wax tablet—*pinakis*—and transliterated it into Hebrew as *pinqes*—"a board, tablet, especially, the folded writing tablets." [7](#) Ancient Jewish writers used wax tablets regularly.

If wax boards were used so extensively, why don't we have more examples? Simply because they were made of perishable organic material.

The set found in Assyria was preserved in the sludge at the bottom of an ancient well. Its conservation seems to its discoverer a "little short of a miracle. ... This singular good fortune has enabled us to rescue from oblivion a class of document which, though it must once have existed in a hundred other cities of Western Asia, has only survived in one. Here we have the earliest known material evidence of what must then have been a familiar form of scribal record." [8](#)

This discovery, Mallowan suggests, may explain "the extraordinary paucity of business documents of the ninth century in Assyria." [9](#)

Why, for example, are there no accounts from the prosperous reign of Assur-nasir-pal and Shalmaneser III? Mallowan concludes that "this hiatus may be accounted for by an extensive use at the time of wood, wax, and perhaps other equally perishable materials to record the normal business transactions of the day." [10](#)

But, one still might object, if Ezekiel were writing on wax boards, why didn't he call them *wax boards*? If he had, he would have done something even the Mesopotamian scribes didn't do.

They didn't call their tablets "*writing boards*" but used instead the nondescript phrase *wooden tablet* (*is leu*). This usage was so firmly fixed in Mesopotamia that even when such boards were made of ivory, they were still called *wooden tablets*!

Sargon's sixteen-board set was called *is leu shin piri*, i.e., a *wooden tablet* of elephant *ivory*. Clearly, "wooden tablet" (*is leu*) had become the technical name for a writing board, regardless of the material from which it was made and regardless of how many boards made up one set.

Since Babylonians used a nondescript phrase to identify the wax writing board, we shouldn't require more of Ezekiel. We might suggest other words he could have used, like *sepher*, *megillah*, *gillayon*, but nonprecise terms often work their way into popular usage without any conscious effort.

Among the scholars who find it possible to read 'ets in Ezekiel 37 as wax writing boards [11](#) is R. J. Williams, who agrees that 'etsim in Ezekiel 37 were wax writing boards because they were joined together. He also notes that wooden tablets were referred to in several places in the Bible: *luach*—"tablet" in Isaiah 30:8 [[Isa. 30:8](#)] and "tables" in Habakkuk 2:2 [[Hab. 2:2](#)]—most likely means a wooden tablet, although in the former passage it may have been of metal. The term *gillayon*, translated "roll" in Isaiah 8:1, [[Isa. 8:1](#)] "almost certainly designates a wooden tablet, since it is to be inscribed with a *heret*, used for carving in Exod. 32:4. [[Ex. 32:4](#)]" [12](#)

Judah's and Joseph's Records

Sargon's sixteen-board set, with thirty writing surfaces, contained enough text—7500 lines—that Max Mallowan claimed to have discovered at Nimrud "the earliest known form of ancient book, complete with binding, the inscribed ivory leaf being the top cover to the whole." [13](#)

Ezekiel's writing boards were labeled "(Belonging) to Judah," that is, "Judah's," and "(Belonging) to Joseph," that is, "Joseph's." His hearers, of course, knew that one tablet for Judah was much too short to contain all of Judah's records, which spanned hundreds of years. Rather, Ezekiel's one board with Judah's name on it symbolized Judah's records, as the one board with Joseph's name on it symbolized all of Joseph's records.

Because of the complex interrelationships of the tribes, any record of Judah would, of necessity, have been a record of various tribal companions residing in Judah's borders: Manasseh, Ephraim, Benjamin, Levi, and various others. ([2 Chr. 11:13–14](#); [2 Chr. 15:9–10](#).) Likewise, within the Nephite branch of Joseph's tribe, there were members of Ephraim, Manasseh, Judah, and perhaps other tribes, depending upon the lineage of Zoram and the companions of Mulek. ([Alma 10:3](#); [Hel. 8:21](#); [2 Ne. 1:30–31](#); [Mosiah 25:2](#); *Journal of Discourses* 23:184.)

Thus, Ezekiel's symbolism consisted of identifying two writing boards with Judah's and Joseph's records, which, in the context of the gathering of Israel, are joined together. He could hardly have found a simpler, more vivid symbol of the gathering of Israel than unification of separate tribal records.

His message indicates that in the day of gathering (the last days), Judah and Joseph would each have a record and that their records would be joined as one. In these last days, do Judah and Joseph have such records? No one, of course, asks the Jews—the "People of the Book"—if Judah has records. And Latter-day Saints readily identify the Book of Mormon as representative of Joseph's record in Ephraim's hands. Judah's and Joseph's records do exist.

Not only did Ezekiel (representing Judah) know that each of these tribes would keep records, but Joseph of old also knew that he and Judah would be keepers of special records. The Lord had told him that "the fruit of thy loins shall write; and the fruit of the loins of Judah shall write; and that which shall be written ... shall grow together." ([2 Ne. 3:12](#).)

Lehi reported this to his children, so the Nephites knew that they would keep records which would be joined with Judah's records. Similarly, Ezekiel taught the Jews that God would join those records together to carry out his work. Thus, the Lord clearly told the two tribes the fate and importance of the records they were keeping.

The Resurrection and Gathering of Scattered Israel

Ezekiel often acted out his message, using tiles to portray the siege of Jerusalem ([Ezek. 4:1–3](#)); lying on his side to indicate the fate of Israel and Judah ([Ezek. 4:4–17](#)); and shaving his head to indicate the fate of the inhabitants of Jerusalem ([Ezek. 5:1–4](#)). His actions were part of his message. Quite naturally, his people would want to know what message he intended by joining together Judah's and Joseph's writing boards while speaking of the gathering.

From the beginning of his ministry, Ezekiel had evoked harsh images of destruction and scattering to induce his people to repent. But with the destruction of Jerusalem ([Ezek. 33:21](#)) and the arrival of more and more Jews in captivity, he turned to themes of gathering and hope. He used two vivid examples of God's power—the resurrection of the dead and the unification of separated records—to give scattered Israelites hope of return.

In Ezekiel's vision, the dry bones of the scattered remnants of Israel were heard to say: "Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost: we are cut off for our parts." ([Ezek. 37:11](#).) But those scattered, hopeless bones were assured that when divine power called them forth they would be covered with sinews, flesh, and skin, and would be filled with breath. ([Ezek. 37:5–6](#).) Israel could look forward to *personal* redemption from the grave.

With the destruction of their nation and the scattering to Babylonia and the four corners of the earth, the Israelites must have felt that *national* revival was also hopeless. But Ezekiel prophesied that the power of God would not only bring scattered bones together again, but would also bring scattered peoples back to their land:

“Behold, O my people, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, and *bring you into the land of Israel.*” ([Ezek. 37:12](#); italics added.)

By this revelation, Ezekiel assured not only contemporary Israelites, whose graves were far from home, but later readers who might die in Rome, or in Russia, or in America, or in Germany that by means of the resurrection God would bring them back to their land. (See [Matt. 5:5](#); JST, Gen. 15:9–12; [Dan. 12:8–13](#); [D&C 38:19–20, 45:11–14.](#))

God's gatherings, however, are not only *spatial*—from the four corners of the earth—and *temporal*—from the various epochs of time—but also *spiritual*. This last part of the gathering is the most crucial of all. When his people are gathered fully back to him, the Lord will be their God and they will be his people. ([Ezek. 37:27.](#)) The unification of Judah's and Joseph's records would be crucial in this spiritual gathering to God.

So when Ezekiel put the two records together and the people asked him what that action meant, he gave them the Lord's answer:

“I will take the children of Israel from among the nations, wither 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, ... but I will save them out of all their dwelling places, wherein they have sinned, and will cleanse them: so shall they be my people, and I will be their God. ([Ezek. 37:21–23.](#)) His people would become a holy, converted people.

The Lord made this same point again when he said that *the appearance in the last days of Joseph's record would be a sign of the Gathering*:

“I give unto you a sign, that ye may know the time when these things shall be about to take place—that I shall gather in, from their long dispersion, my people, O house of Israel, and shall establish again among them my Zion. ... When these things which I declare unto you ... shall be made known unto the Gentiles ... it shall be a sign unto them, that ... the work of the Father hath already commenced unto the fulfilling of the covenant which he hath made unto the people who are of the house of Israel.” ([3 Ne. 21:1–7.](#))

When Christ's words were published in the Book of Mormon in 1830, the things that he had declared to the Nephites were made known to the Gentiles. Thus, the appearance of Joseph's record—which made possible the joining of that record with Judah's—was a sign that the gathering had commenced.

Mormon, the editor of Joseph's records, also saw the latter-day appearance of his abridgement as a sign of the gathering of Israel: “*When* the Lord shall see fit, in his wisdom, that these sayings shall come unto the Gentiles ... *then ye may know* that the covenant which the Father hath made with the children of Israel, concerning their restoration to the lands of their inheritance, is already beginning to be fulfilled.” ([3 Ne. 29:1](#); italics added.) His “when-then” prophecy is as clear as the [3 Ne. 21:1–7](#) prophecy by Jesus just mentioned: *the publication of the Book of Mormon signals the beginning of the gathering.*

Indeed, Mormon's “when-then” prophecy is as clear as Ezekiel's. *When* Ezekiel put Judah's and Joseph's records together, *then* he promised that the Lord would take “the children of Israel. ... and will gather them ... and bring them into their own land; and ... make them one nation in the land upon the mountains of Israel ... and they shall be no more two nations. ... and [the Lord] will cleanse them” so they will be his people and he will be their God ([Ezek. 37:20–27.](#)) His actions are the *When* of the inspired communication, and his prophetic words are the timing for the *Then* of the gathering.

Ezekiel demonstrated that the joining of two records, one for Judah and one for Joseph, would be a sign that Israel would be spiritually and physically gathered in from their long dispersion to become one nation led by God. *The appearance of the Book of Mormon was crucial to the gathering.* That record and the Bible would need to work together to bring about the spiritual gathering.

The Bible Alone Is Inadequate to Effect the Gathering

To understand the need for the joining and how it fits with the crucial spiritual gathering, we must know something about the conditions of latter-day Israel.

As effective as the Bible is in leading people back to God, it needs divine confirmation. Learned men and spiritual guides, having only the Bible, debate which words are divine, what authority biblical words have for modern man, and what a person must do to walk the strait and narrow way to God. They contend over the nature of God, the characteristics of his plan, and the purpose of earth life. Consequently, while they need decisive answers to their questions, they are divided over what the Bible says.

The source of this difficulty began, as explained in Joseph's book, when many plain and precious parts of the gospel were deliberately taken from the Bible to "pervert the right ways of the Lord" and to "blind the eyes and harden the hearts of the children of men." ([1 Ne. 13:27](#).) This has led to contention over the simplest aspects of faith.

Judah, in the person of Jeremiah, knew that perverse men in his own day were already manipulating the law of the Lord: "How can you say, 'We are wise, we have the law of the Lord,' when scribes with their lying pens have falsified it?" (The New English Bible, [Jer. 8:8](#).) [14](#) Consequently, as Nephi predicted, "an exceedingly great many do stumble, yea, insomuch that Satan hath great power over them." ([1 Ne. 13:29](#).)

Plain and simple doctrine is necessary to fully bring people back to God, but the plain and simple doctrine in the Bible had been compromised. *God therefore promised to establish the truth of his gospel by uniting Joseph's testimony with Judah's.*

"I will manifest myself unto thy seed, that they shall write many things which I shall minister unto them, which shall be plain and precious; ... these things shall be hid up, to come forth unto the Gentiles. ... And in them shall be written my gospel." ([1 Ne. 13:35–36](#).)

These and other writings mentioned in verse 39 "shall establish the truth of the first, which are of the twelve apostles of the Lamb, and shall make known the plain and precious things which have been taken away from them; and shall make known ... that the Lamb of God is the Son of the Eternal Father, and the Savior of the world; and that all men must come unto him, or they cannot be saved.

"And they must come according to the words which shall be established by the mouth of the Lamb; and the words of the Lamb shall be made known in the records of thy seed, as well as in the records of the twelve apostles of the Lamb; wherefore they both shall be established in one; for there is one God and one Shepherd over all the earth." ([1 Ne. 13:40–41](#).) *The clear point is that divine truth will be established by two divine witnesses—the two records that are to come together in the hand of God to establish his truth.*

The Lord asserted the crucial role of the Book of Mormon in the spiritual gathering when he commanded Nephi to write his sayings, that those "who shall be scattered ... because of their unbelief, may be brought ... to a knowledge of me, their Redeemer.

"And then will I gather them in from the four quarters of the earth; and then will I fulfil the covenant which the Father hath made unto all the people of the house of Israel." ([3 Ne. 16:4–5](#).)

Complex movements have complex origins, and God had to do many things to make gathering possible. Two independent witnesses had to coalesce to convince truth-seekers that God is the same today as yesterday, that there is only one Messiah, that his plan of salvation is the same, that he saves all of his children, and that he keeps his covenants with his children. To this end, priesthood keys and organization, temples, and missionary work all had to be restored. But all of these came when the "keystone" to the gospel arch was put in place and a man could learn true doctrine and get closer to God. By being joined together, Joseph's and Judah's testimonies would confound false doctrines, lay down contentions, establish peace, and remind readers of God's covenants with their fathers. All this would occur when God began to restore his people. (See [2 Ne. 3:12–13](#).)

The testimony of the Book of Mormon and the Bible together will accomplish what the Bible cannot do

alone. The Lord explained to Nephi, “Know ye not that the testimony of two nations is a witness unto you that I am God? ... And when the two nations shall run together the testimony of the two nations shall run together also.

“And I do this that I may prove unto many that I am the same yesterday, today, and forever. ...

“My people, which are of the house of Israel, shall be gathered home unto the lands of their possessions; and my word also shall be gathered in one. And I will show ... that I covenanted with Abraham that I would remember his seed forever.” ([2 Ne. 29:8–9, 14.](#))

The Lord's gathering is to be more than a gathering of bones back to their bodies and of live bodies back to their land. His gathering would require that souls be gathered to him and his word. Only such souls, who would choose him to be their God, could become his people.

The coming forth of the Book of Mormon signals the beginning of a special outpouring of God's power to gather his people in the latter days.

The Gathering Is Part of God's Restoration

That there are in the twentieth century two books, one belonging to Judah and his tribal companions and one belonging to Joseph and his tribal companions, is a miracle of major significance; they are marvelous works and wonders. That these two books have been united for the first time in history to aid in the gathering work, at the time when God has set about to make one fold having one shepherd, is another miracle.

Ephraim is being identified and gathered—those scattered among the gentiles as well as those in the Western hemisphere descended from Joseph; and the vanguard of Judah has reestablished itself. Much more gathering lies in the future before all Israelites are gathered to the land of their inheritance and united under one king. Much of this will occur when Christ comes (see [D&C 133:25–35](#)) and when the Resurrection takes place, as Ezekiel testified.

No uninspired man could have given a signal to the world in the early 1800s that God's long-awaited gathering was about to begin. But God gave that signal through Joseph Smith.

After Ezekiel had acted out the unification of records, uniting Judah's writing board with Joseph's, he prophesied that the Lord “will take the children of Israel from among the [Gentiles], ... and will gather them on every side, and bring them into their own land. ... So shall they be my people, and I will be their God.” ([Ezek. 37:16, 21, 23.](#)) No wonder, then, that when the time came for the gathering to take place that Moroni, the keyholder “of the record of the stick of Ephraim” ([D&C 27:5](#)) appeared to Joseph Smith. He introduced himself as “an angel of God, sent to bring joyful tidings that the covenant which God made with ancient Israel was at hand to be fulfilled.” (*History of the Church*, 4:537.) No wonder that, within one twenty-four hour period, Moroni had quoted and explained to Joseph Smith four different times how God was about to “set his hand again the second time to recover the remnant of his people” from the various nations where they were scattered and how he should “set up an ensign for the nations, and ... assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the corners of the earth.” ([Isa. 11:11–12](#); see [JS—H 1:40.](#)) What a message for a mere lad, who would soon learn, from the same angel, about the record of Joseph that would make all this possible!

The Bible and the Book of Mormon are divine instruments prepared by the Lord to help effect his gathering work. Both records testify that Jesus is the Christ, the Savior of the world, and that all men must come to him to be saved. God's purposes cannot be fulfilled merely by bringing people back to their land—he has to bring them back to himself. *The fulness of the gospel message, made clear by the joining of these two sacred testaments, touches the honest in heart and gathers them to God.*

Is it any wonder, then, that when Joseph's record had come from the ground (see [Isa. 29:4–5](#)) and the book had been delivered to him that was not learned—the young Joseph Smith (see [Isa. 29:12](#)), that the Lord could unite Joseph's record with Judah's and do his marvelous work? Then, said he, shall the “deaf

hear the words of the book, and the eyes of the blind shall see out of obscurity, ... and Jacob shall not now be ashamed, neither shall his face now wax pale. But when he seeth his children, the work of mine hands, in the midst of him, they shall sanctify my name, and sanctify the Holy One of Jacob, and shall fear the God of Israel." ([Isa. 29:18, 22–23.](#))

The Book of Mormon is the anciently prophesied book that joins with the Bible to unite mankind to the truth in latter-days as part of the preparatory gathering work prior to the second coming of the Lord.

[illustration] It now seems clear that the prophet Ezekiel was referring to wax writing boards in his prophecy about the “sticks” of Judah and Joseph. Wooden or ivory boards were filled with wax, inscribed with a stylus, then bound together to protect the writing surfaces, making them “one in the hand” of the scribe. The most recent discovery, as well as the oldest known example of wax writing boards, dating from the 14th century B.C., was found in a shipwreck off the southwestern coast of modern Turkey. This discovery was reported at the November 1986 annual meeting of the American School of Oriental Research. (Illustrated by Robert Barrett.)

[photo] This bas-relief, dated 740 B.C., about 150 years before Ezekiel, is of King Bar Rekub. The inscription at the top is Aramaic—a sister tongue of Hebrew used by the king’s Aramaic-speaking scribe. (Stele of Bar Rekub. Photo used by permission of Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Vorderasiatisches Museum.)

[photo] This Assyrian bas-relief, dated about 740–715 B.C., evidences the popularity of writing boards anciently. The boards were portable, light, allowed alterations easily, and could even be used in the field for accounting purposes. Similar archeological discoveries since Joseph Smith’s time support his interpretation of Ezekiel’s “sticks” as wooden tablets which are joined together as one book. (Photo used by permission of British School of Archeology in Iraq.)

[photos] The use of wax writing boards was widespread in many cultures. The boards above are Roman in origin. The raised edges protected the writing when the two wax surfaces were placed face to face. (Top left: Photo by Keith Meservy, from the British Museum, London.) The holes on the inside edges allowed the boards to be hinged together like a book, as represented in the Neo-Hittite bas-relief (right; C. Contenau, *Manuel D’Archeologie Orientale* 4:2215, used by permission), dated about 700 B.C., found near Marash, Turkey, and in the frescoes from Pompei (opposite page; *Paquio Proculo and His Wife*, Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Napoli; *Portrait of a Woman*, Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Napoli). Pompei, Italy, was founded in the late 6th century or early 5th century B.C. and was the site of many Roman villas before it was destroyed by a volcanic eruption in 79 B.C. These excavated frescoes evidence again that writing boards were used anciently in many cultures over long time periods, supporting Ezekiel’s reference to tablets in his prophecy on latter-day gathering.

[illustration] When the time came for the gathering of Israel to take place, the angel Moroni appeared to Joseph Smith and taught him how the Lord was going to recover the scattered remnants of Israel. Moroni later delivered to the Prophet the “record of the stick of Ephraim”—the Book of Mormon—as a major tool to help effect the gathering. (Painting by Tom Lovell.)

[illustration] Priesthood keys and organization, temples, and missionary work all had to be restored. But preceding these was the publication of the Book of Mormon, the “keystone” of the gospel arch. Joined with the record of Judah—the Bible—this record of Joseph confounds false doctrines, lays down contention, and establishes peace. (Illustrated by Robert Barrett.)

[illustration] The Bible and the Book of Mormon testify that Jesus is the Christ, the Savior of the world, and that all men must come to him to be saved. The fulness of the gospel message, made clear by joining of these two sacred testaments, touches the honest in heart and gathers them to God. (Illustrated by Robert Barrett.)

Notes

1. M. San Nicolo, "Haben die Babylonier Wachstafeln als Shriftraeger gekannt?" *Orientalia* 17 (1948), pp. 59–70.
 2. D. J. Wiseman, "Assyrian Writing-Boards," *Iraq* 17 (1955), p. 7.
 3. Ibid.
 4. A. Leo Oppenheim, *Ancient Mesopotamia* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1964), p. 242.
 5. M. E. L. Mallowan, *Nimrud and Its Remains* (London: Collins, 1966), 1:161.
 6. Samuel Krauss, *Talmudische Archaeologic III* (Hildesheim: George Olms Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1966), p. 144.
 7. Marcus Jastrow, *A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Jerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature II* (Brooklyn, N.Y.: B. Shalom Pub. Inc., 1967), p. 1165.
 8. M. E. L. Mallowan, "Excavations at Nimrud: 1953," *Iraq* 16 (1956), p. 102.
 9. Ibid.
 10. Ibid.
 11. See Herbert G. May's commentary on Ezekiel 37 in *Interpreter's Bible*, 4:270.
 12. R. J. Williams, "Writing," *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, 4:917. See also Kurt Galling, "Tafel, Buch und Blatt," *Near Eastern Studies in Honor of William Foxwell Albright*, ed. Hans Goedicke (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1971), pp. 207–23.
 13. Mallowan, "Excavations," p. 99.
 14. See also the translations of the verse in the Revised Standard Version, Jerusalem Bible, and New International Version.
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Notes

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Ezekiel (/ÉÈ`ziÉÉ™/; Hebrew: עֶזְקֵאל‎; Greek: Ἐζεκιήλ [jÉ™ÄŞ.É˘zÉ`qeÉ]); LXX KoinÄ“ Greek: Ἐζεκιήλ [i.É˘.zÉ˘.kiÉ`el]) is the central protagonist of the Book of Ezekiel in the Hebrew Bible. In Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, Ezekiel is acknowledged as a Hebrew prophet. In Judaism and Christianity, he is also viewed as the 6th-century BCE author of the Book of Ezekiel, which reveals prophecies regarding the destruction of Jerusalem, the restoration to the land of Israel, and what some call the Bibliographic Citation. Meservy, Keith H.. "Ezekielâ€™s Sticks and the Gathering of Israel." Ensign 17, no. 2 (1987): 4-13. More like this. Ezekielâ€™s Sticks. Scriptures. The Stick of Judah and the Stick of Joseph, Conclusion. The Stick of Judah and the Stick of Joseph, Part IV. The Stick of Judah and the Stick of Joseph, Part III. Thus Ezekielâ€™s ministry covered a span of at least twentyâ€™three years. His message was delivered before and after the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. He spoke to all Israel, but locally to the exiles whom Jeremiah addressed by letter (e.g., Jer. 29), as people who continued to listen to false prophets and practice idolatry.â€ Not only was Ezekiel deeply immersed in the ancient traditions of Israel, but the prophetâ€™s message shows many signs of being influenced by a study of Israelâ€™s sacred writings. The impact of a collection of authoritative writings is strong throughout the book. . . . Thus, for example, in ch.â€ Ezekiel sees the idol of jealousy (see above) and the people committing idolatry. d. The entrance of the court (8:7â€™13).