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The Stick of Judah and the Stick of Joseph, Conclusion

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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 fifth and final part concludes the series.

The Stick of JUDAH and the Stick of JOSEPH

CONCLUSION

by Hugh Nibley, Ph.D.

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CYRIL of Alexandria notes that "everywhere life is by the wood," as sin came by the wood, so also redemption comes by the wood, and he cites the rod of Moses and the cross of Christ.¹¹⁸

Jerome says the two rods of Ezekiel are the church and the synagogue,¹¹⁹ while the two rods of which Isaiah speaks are the congregations of the Jews on the one hand and the Gentiles on the other;¹²⁰ and again, "the two rods are the covenant of God with men twice entered upon," i.e., the Old and the New Testaments;¹²¹ the joining of the two to make one scepter signifies that which is joined together in the baptism of Christ, united "to make one new man."¹²²

Why are not these interpretations accepted by the Christian commentators of our day? Because while the Old Testament conspicuously satisfies all qualifications for the Stick of Judah, the New Testament is not a whit less the property of Judah, having on the other hand no special affinity for Joseph, with whom in fact neither the Gentile congregation for the Christian Church have any direct connection. The license of allegory, all but unlimited throughout most of the scriptures, is peculiarly checked in Ezekiel 37, and the scholar or churchman who would make an arbitrary "spiritual" interpretation of the chapter finds his usual liberty severely curtailed, for Ezekiel employs concrete symbols to illustrate an historical event. The terms he uses are specific; the names of Israel, Joseph, and Judah are not mysterious, and the great events to which he refers are those to which the chosen people have been instructed to look forward for centuries, and for which the Christians have yearned no less. In Ezekiel's prophecy Joseph does not absorb Judah, as the church

is supposed to have absorbed the synagogue; Joseph is not a Gentile, but as authentically of Israel as Judah is; it is Israel that triumphs, not the Gentiles; the sticks represent covenants between two nations that are contemporary, not as Jerome suggests, the making of a single covenant with the same nation at two different times; both nations are to be brought back home again after having been scattered from a common center, and hence no Gentile nation qualifies for the promise—"God hath not cast away his people which he foreknew." The whole situation is clearly set forth in Ezekiel 37: The chapter is speaking of the scattering and gathering of Israel and the resurrection;¹²³ there cannot be the slightest doubt as to what is meant by Joseph and Judah, and while the *New Testament* might conceivably be described as the stick of Judah, by no effort of the imagination can it be interpreted as the stick of Joseph. It is on the Stick of Joseph that every attempt to interpret the passage breaks down hopelessly.

It is as if we were completing a jigsaw puzzle. There is a peculiarly shaped blank which calls for a missing piece designated as the Stick of Judah. The Old Testament fits easily into the gap. Then there remains an adjacent blank space to be filled by a missing "Stick of Joseph." Naturally the first thing we do is to try to slip the New Testament into it. But turn it and push it and force it as we will, the New Testament simply does not belong there, for it is not the story of "Joseph and his associates" in contradistinction to that of "Judah and his associates," which makes up the Bible—if anything it belongs to the latter class, to the Stick of Judah. Since the missing piece refuses to be found, the skilful jigsaw artist simply goes ahead and completes the rest of the picture, and then if the missing piece is still lost, he can infer from the shape of the last empty space and from the design and color of the surrounding areas almost exactly what the missing piece should be. This is what we are attempting here. When the Bible commentators failed to supply the missing piece or to agree on what it should look like, we simply continued to work out the puzzle, putting into position every piece we could find that had to do with sticks and covenants. As a result we are now in a position to make some pretty near guesses as to the shape, size, and color of the missing piece to our puzzle—the baffling "Stick of Joseph."

Let us read the text again, sticking as close to the Hebrew as possible:

Ez. 37:16: And the word of the Lord came to me, saying, And thou, son of
(Continued on following page)



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THE STICK OF JUDAH AND THE STICK OF JOSEPH

(Continued from preceding page)
 man, take to thyself one (piece of) wood and write upon it for Judah and for the children of Israel his associates, and take one wood and write upon it for Joseph wood of Ephraim and all the house of Israel his associates (17) And approach them one to (the) other for thee for one wood so they shall become for single ones in thy hand (18) And when they say to thee the sons of thy people, wilt thou not show us what thou meanest by this? (lit.:

what these are to thee?) (19) Say to them, Thus saith the Lord Jehovah, Behold I will take the wood of Joseph, which is in the hand of Ephraim and the staves (or sceptres) of Israel his associates and I shall place them upon it along with (or alongside) the wood of Judah and I shall make them for one wood, and they shall be one in my hand (20) And the woods which thou hast written upon (shall be) in thy hand before their eyes (21) So say to them, Thus
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Without Higher Help

Richard L. Evans

WHEN we think of America's patriots of the past, there are two who almost unfailingly are mentioned, whom this month we hold in special remembrance. Washington and Lincoln were markedly different in many ways. In some things they were similar—one in particular: in their earnest prayerful petitioning of Providence for help in meeting their grievous problems. We often expect much of men. And there is much that sincere and able and honest men can do. But men, after all, are men. And with so many men thinking and working and planning against so many other men, it is going to be more than men that will determine the ultimate outcome. If we—if any of us—if you (meaning each of us)—if you would wish to convince yourself unforgettably of this solemn fact, suppose for the moment that the world's weighty problems were placed in your hands for some immediate solution. Just what would you do? Suppose that the lives of millions of men, suppose that all we hold dear, suppose that freedom, that civilization itself were to be saved or lost by your word, by your wisdom. What would be your answer? What course would you choose? Which way would you go? (Suppose that only one life depended upon you. Even that would be very weighty.) Remember that you are only a man with the wisdom of a man, even as are all other men. Some are wiser than others; some more able; some have more knowledge of some things. But all have limitations, and all make mistakes. None of them is omniscient. And so suppose you put yourself in the place of those who have grave and grievous problems placed upon them, and think how urgently they need insight and inspiration, how urgently they need our earnest prayers, as well as their own. It is easy to see how such men as have been mentioned, and many others also, have been brought to their knees in acknowledgment of their need for divine direction (even as we know our own need in meeting even our own daily personal problems). Mere men without higher help are woefully inadequate. But by prayer and repentance and by living for the guidance of the Lord God, men and nations have right and reason to expect the answers to their perplexing problems.*

*Revised.

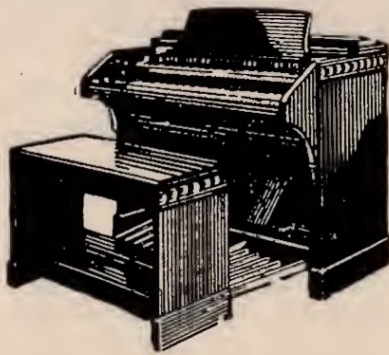
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The Stick of Judah and The Stick of Joseph

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saith the Lord Jehovah, Behold I will take the sons of Israel out of the nations among whom they walk, and will gather them from round about and lead them into their land," etc.

In connection with this must be taken the previous episode: verse 11: "And he said to me Son of man, these bones *are the whole house of Israel*; behold, they say, our bones are dried, and our hope has perished; we are destroyed! (12) Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus saith the Lord Jehovah, Behold I will open your graves, and cause you to come out of your graves, my people, and bring you to the land of Israel . . ." etc. Here, as Rabbi Fisch notes, "the prediction of national resurrection, as symbolized in the vision of the dry bones, is followed by the symbolic action of the reunion of the two Kingdoms. . . ." ¹²⁴ That the prophet, referring to the resurrection of the flesh as well was recognized by the ancients—of course this has been too much for the scholars, who even in Terluthan's time were determined to see in this a purely symbolic resurrection. But what specifically is the "wood of Judah"—why does the prophet choose this particular symbol? Because it symbolizes both a writing and a covenant, and the unique means by which Judah is to be recognized and distinguished in the world—it is Judah's tribal staff. All of which says as plain as day—it is the scripture. What, then, is the stick or wood of Joseph? Likewise a writing and a covenant, something written "for Joseph and those associated with Joseph." It is a compound document, like the Bible, but it is not the Bible, for it deals with that branch of Israel concerned with Joseph, not Judah, as the Bible does, and it will be held in the hand of Ephraim. After it has been brought together, it will be placed by the side of the wood of Judah and his associates that has been compiled in a like manner. When this is done, the two will match perfectly, thereby proving the identity and the claims of parties long separated and thought dead and vindicating their former common covenant with God. This will be a great miracle of recogni-

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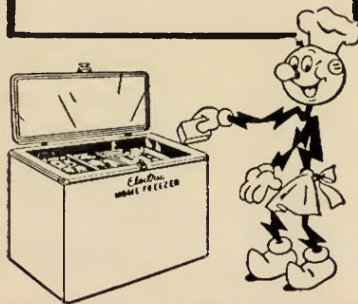
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THE STICK OF JUDAH AND THE STICK OF JOSEPH

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tion, of a piece (as Rabbi Fisch observes) with the supreme miracle of restoring the dead nations to life in the fulness of times. The long and complete separation of the two nations is an important part of the story (*dudum separata*, says

Jerome).¹²⁵ But there was no such separation between the Jews of the Old Testament and those of the New: the people, like their book, represent, as they proclaim and Jesus admits, an unbroken continuation of tradition and blood from the days

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*A... heart that doeth good
like a medicine*

Richard L. Evans

WE SOMETIMES use formidable words to express simple ideas. Consider, for example, the word *psychosomatic*. While its common use may be relatively recent, its essential idea of the effect of mind over matter, over happiness, over health, is certainly not new. Many centuries ago a man of much wisdom suggested the sense of the subject in a simple scriptural sentence: "A merry heart doeth good like a medicine. . . ." And then he added: "but a broken spirit drieth the bones."¹ It is easy to prescribe, but it isn't always easy to administer the "medicine of a merry heart," for there is often much to make hearts heavy. There are sorrows; there is sickness; there is sin. There are disappointments, cruelty, unkindness; the loss of loved ones, and loneliness. And if we would, we could easily succumb to the negative side and shut out the sunlight and become darkly depressed. But if we did, we would be overlooking one of life's chief purposes and ultimate aims, for the pursuit of happiness is one of the rights that is said to be inalienable, and "men are that they might have joy." This principle hasn't always found understanding or acceptance, but if we will look at the essential facts, we shall see that it is basically so: for we are here on earth as children of a loving Father who has blessed us with the privilege of life and with all else that is ours. And surely the purpose of a loving Father for his children would be sincere happiness. It is true that we sometimes receive (and no doubt sometimes deserve) discipline. It is true that some of us sometimes mar our happiness by our own foolish, strongheaded acts and utterances. And it is true that some of us may sometimes be subject to unhappiness that we don't seem to need or that we don't deserve. But these things we shall sometime understand (as we now understand some of the purposes of our parents which were not so understandable to us in our younger years). And if we will keep faith—faith that our Father intends peace and progress and sincere, sound happiness for his children; faith in the purposefulness of life, which is limitless and everlasting; faith in the purpose and power of God to give to each of us complete compensation—with such faith we can survive the hurts, with a "heart that doeth good like a medicine."

¹Proverbs 17:22.

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of the Old Covenant; no identification is needed here—"ye are indeed Abraham's children," etc.

To fill the qualifications of the Stick of Joseph we must have, then,

1) a writing,
2) compounded of the doings of the descendants and associates of Joseph, (not Judah);

3) it must be held in the hand of Ephraim, who is of Joseph, not Judah;

4) it must be much like the Bible, the Stick of Judah, so much so that the two will fit together perfectly like two parts of a single tally-stick;

5) it must be brought forth long after the scattering of Israel, at a time when "the whole house of Israel" shall say "our bones are dried, and our hope has perished; we are destroyed!"

6) it must go forth as a summons "before their eyes" at that time when the Lord sets his hand to "take the children of Israel from among the heathen, whither they be gone. . . ."

7) the bringing together of the two documents will reverse the process described in Zechariah, by which covenants between these two nations and God were broken when two rods were "cut in two," for as all commentators agree, the joining of the sticks means the re-establishment of the old covenants between them.

In the Book of Mormon we have a document that fulfils all these qualifications, and even the Doctrine and Covenants and Pearl of Great Price may enter into the picture, for they are all of Joseph, are all given into the hand of Ephraim to propagate and defend, and are all bound together as "one stick" with the Book of Mormon. All of which would plead strongly for the claims of the Book of Mormon even in a field of competitors. But where are the competitors? We have seen that the doctors do not agree for a minute on what the sticks of Ezekiel were or how they were joined together; we have further seen that they try to whittle away Ezekiel's full account by diligently altering the text. They might save themselves the trouble, for the Book of Mormon offers an explanation which (1) leaves the text *almost* as it stands, (2) offers literal fulfilment of a prophecy which all will admit Ezekiel meant should be literally fulfilled, and (3) sees in the "mystery" per-

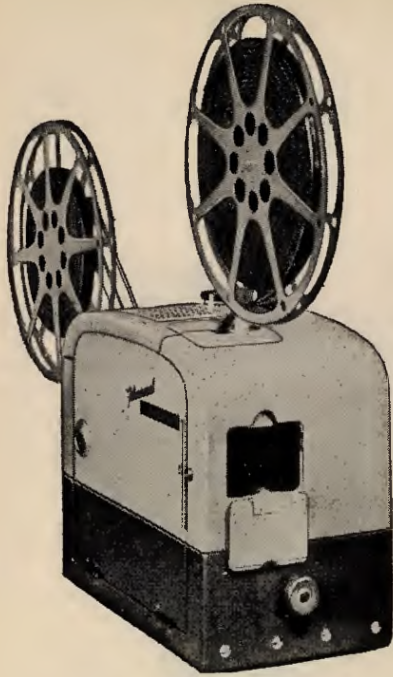
formed by the prophet with the sticks a familiar and established institution and not a wild and unbridled fantasy of the prophet which would have meant nothing to his hearers.

Against the Book of Mormon explanation there is just one objection. It assumes that Ezekiel actually was a prophet. For the scholars, that spoils everything. In criticizing historical texts it is essential to recognize that a man cannot possibly talk about events that occur after his death. Only this fundamental principle of historical criticism cannot be applied to prophetic writings: When the purpose of an investigation is to test the validity of a revelation, we can hardly take as our basic rule of criticism the proposition that revelation is impossible! Yet this is exactly what the scholars have done. Thus the celebrated Eduard Meyer can report of Ezekiel: "That the visions and symbols are literary fictions is obvious; and the same goes for all the other accounts."¹²⁶ By what gift of divination is this obvious? "The prophetic apparatus," he continues, "has sunk to the most literal forms. Ezekiel is a literary grind, he does not work through the living word, struggling for expression from the depths of the soul as with Isaiah and Jeremiah . . . but he simply gives us the contents of a book which he is supposed to have swallowed in a vision. . . . Ezekiel is narrowminded, limited, without sweep or power, completely devoid of creative imagination "Phantasie" and hence marked by unendurable pedantry and monotony."¹²⁷

Interestingly enough, these are the same charges that the same Eduard Meyer brings against Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon. Whereas, he tells us, Mohammed, like a true religious hero, sweated blood to produce the Koran, and went through those long and terrible periods of doubt and inner struggle through which every proper religious founder should fight his way to growing self-realization, etc., etc., Joseph Smith showed the unpardonably bad taste never to have betrayed the slightest doubt as to his calling: "It is very significant in the case of Joseph Smith," we are told, "that the question of such doubting never arises,

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however readily he questions the vision and inspirations of others when they do not please him. . . . Thus Mohammed's revelations are higher than Joseph Smith's because in them we feel, at least in the earliest Suras, something of the power of a conviction won by a truly strenuous spiritual struggle, and at times we sense even a poetical exhilaration."¹²⁸ Neither Joseph Smith nor Ezekiel is the kind of prophet (as Mohammed is) to please a German professor; both are guilty of the "crassest literalism." While Mohammed's book remains decently invisible in the hand of the angel, Joseph Smith, without the slightest feeling for drama, mystery, or the usual religious amenities, actually copies out the characters of his holy book for circulation!¹²⁹ Poetry, "Phantasia," inner struggle—such are the stuff of prophetic experience for Eduard Meyer and the lesser pedants, and any thought that a prophet might really be a prophet and not merely a poet, thinker, or moralist is quite out of the question. And so in criticizing the modern Joseph and the ancient Ezekiel in identical terms one of the greatest modern scholars bears unintentional witness to the existence of a class of prophetic experience totally beyond the ken of the academician. Needless to say, when such prophets speak the doctors are not equipped to judge them. Whether Ezekiel was really prophesying or not does not depend on whether this or that scholar thinks prophecy is possible. The whole account of the Stick of Judah and the Stick of Joseph should serve to admonish us that there are many things hidden from the wise and prudent which are known to the prophets of the Lord and shared by them with his people. In due time these things come one by one to the knowledge of the outside world but in the meantime we may rest assured that the Saints are under no obligation to accept every conjecture that engages the fancy of the Scribes and Pharisees.

(The End)

REFERENCES

¹²⁸In *Patrol. Graec.* LXXI, 129.

¹²⁹In *Patrol. Lat.* XXII, 683.

¹²⁰*Patrol. Lat.* XXXV, 518; cf. CLXVIII, 786.

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THE STICK OF JUDAH AND THE STICK OF JOSEPH

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¹²¹Patrol. Lat. CLXVIII, 786.

¹²²Patrol. Lat. XXV, 353.

¹²³Tertullian, *de Resurr.* c. 29, cites Ezekiel 37 as proof of an ancient belief in the resurrection, and notes (c. 30), that whereas heretics say it refers to the restoration of the Jews to their land, it nonetheless shows

that the resurrection had been revealed earlier to the Jews. What settles the argument in favor of a real resurrection is the very frequent reference to the resurrection of the flesh in early Jewish Apocryphal writings. Thus in the very early *Life of Adam and Eve* li, 2, Michael appears to Seth and

(Concluded on following page)

"Little Brass Nails..."

Richard L. Evans

PERHAPS all of us pursue some things which, after we acquire them, seem somewhat shallow or shoddy or at least unessential. And then we wonder why we wished for them so much and worked for them so hard, and passed by more worth-while things we might have had. There is a parable by John Ruskin that has much to suggest concerning this subject. He said it was a dream, but we rather surmise it was a dream he deliberately dreamed for the purpose of putting over a point: "I dreamed," he said, "that I was at a child's . . . party, in which every means of entertainment had been provided . . . by a wise and kind host. . . . The children had been set free in the rooms and gardens, with no care whatever but how to pass their afternoon rejoicingly. . . . There was music . . . all manner of amusing books . . . a workshop . . . a table loaded with everything nice to eat . . . and whatever a child could fancy . . . but in the midst of all this it struck two or three of the more 'practical' children that they would like some of the brass-headed nails that studded the chairs, and so they set to work to pull them out. In a little while all the children, nearly, were spraining their fingers in pulling out brass-headed nails. With all that they could pull out they were not satisfied; and then everybody wanted some of somebody else's. And at last the really 'practical' and 'sensible' ones declared that nothing was of any real consequence that afternoon except to get plenty of brass-headed nails. . . . And at last they began to fight for nail heads, . . . even though they knew they would not be allowed to carry so much as one brass knob away with them. But no! it was, 'Who has most nails? . . . I must have as many as you before I leave the house or I cannot possibly go home in peace.' At last they made so much noise that I awoke, and thought to myself, 'What a false dream that is of children. . . . Children never do such foolish things. Only men do.'" And so ended Ruskin's dream of the children and the little brass nails. One of the greatest gifts of God is a sound sense of values. It is a gift of inestimable worth, for those who have a limited time to live—which, so far as the limits of this life are concerned, includes all of us. And yet, even as the foolish children referred to, it would seem that much too much of our time may be taken in struggling for little brass nails, which we cannot take home with us at the end of the day.

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says: "Man of God, mourn not for thy dead more than six days, for on the seventh day is the sign of the resurrection, and the rest of the age to come." Such expressions are common in the earliest Christian fragments. The ancient Jewish belief in the resurrection of the flesh is a subject deserving of special treatment, but since there undoubtedly was such a belief, the remarks of Ezekiel regarding dead bones would have been referred before everything else to it.
¹²⁴Ezekiel, p. 249.

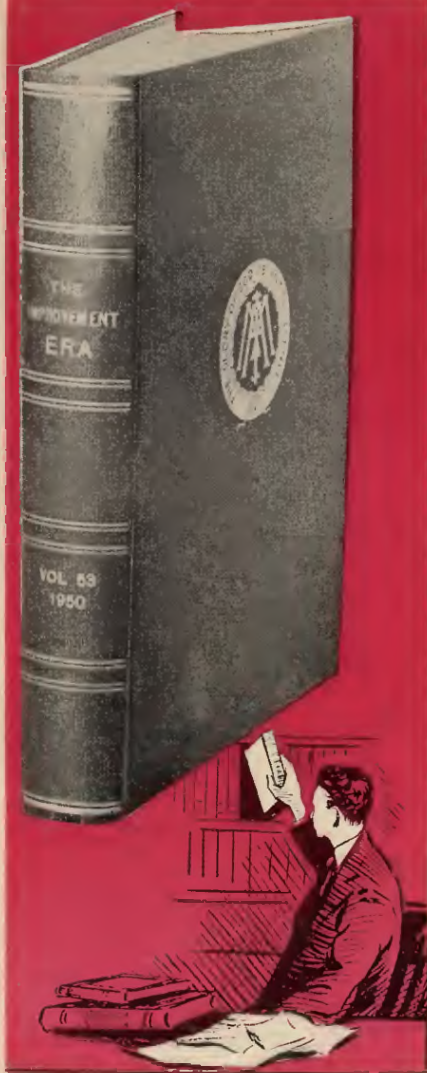
¹²⁵Vere enim in adventu Domini Salvatoris, duae virgae, et ut in Hebraico positum est, duo ligna in unum juncta sunt sceptrum, et in baptisate Christi dudum separata sociantur: ut fiant in unum novum hominen. Comment. in Ezech. xi, ch. 37, in Patrol. Lat. XXV, 353.

¹²⁶Geschichte des Altertums IV, 1. 167, n. 1.

¹²⁷Ibid., pp. 168, 170f.

¹²⁸Ed. Meyer, Ursprung u. Gesch. der Mormonen (Berlin, 1904), p. 80ff.

¹²⁹Ibid., pp. 81f.



May Quiz

1. How is your reference library?
2. Have you ever considered the articles which appear in the Era for their reference value?
3. Did you know that you may have an indexed reference to all the articles in the Era each year at less than the cost of a good book of reference?

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...men in the making

Richard L. Evans

As we see a new home, finished and landscaped and lovely, we may partly forget the process by which it was brought into being. There was dirt to be dug; and rough materials to be shaped and put in place—and littered plaster and sawdust and shavings and much noise along with all else. And while it was in the making, we had to have perspective, and we had to have faith—faith in the plan, in the blueprint, in the materials, and in the men who made it. We had to believe that it would someday be what it promised to be. This is true of other things also. Paintings and portraits look anything but lovely when the artist first begins to daub. The pottery we see and buy and much admire begins as mud—a special kind of mud to be sure, but mud nevertheless. When we see a boy in adolescence, we have to have faith, or a boy first learning to play the piano, or a girl first fingering the violin. The first hesitating notes, the first unsure sounds are not the finished product, but they are the promise of things to come. They are part of the practice and the pain that it takes to arrive at a finished performance. We need to know the ultimate objective and then trust people and principles and proven processes to bring about the ultimate outcome. We have to trust for many things—intelligently—but we have to trust. And we have to overlook the imperfections of many things in the making. We are not perfect, any of us—and to others and to our Father in heaven we must look like pretty crude clay at times in some of our actions and utterances—and perhaps all of us have reason to criticize all of us in the eternal process of reaching for perfection. But if a person shows honest and earnest effort and intent to pursue sound purposes and principles, we should be as long-suffering (or try to be) as our Father in heaven is with us, and not be too quick to judge or criticize or condemn before we see the product in patient perspective.

"The Spoken Word" FROM TEMPLE SQUARE
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