



2015

For Zion: A Mormon Theology of Hope

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Recommended Citation

McCombs, Lauren (2015) "For Zion: A Mormon Theology of Hope," *BYU Studies Quarterly*. Vol. 54 : Iss. 1 , Article 20.

Available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/byusq/vol54/iss1/20>

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For Zion: A Mormon Theology of Hope, by Joseph M. Spencer (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2014)

In this book, Joseph Spencer uses the differences between the original manuscript and the published text of Doctrine and Covenants 42 to argue that the law of consecration is neither a bygone utopian dream nor a future demand that we are not yet qualified to live. It is a law for today, “an outline of exactly how we as Saints are to live right now, wherever we are” (105).

Before delving into the Doctrine and Covenants, however, Spencer spends the first half of his discourse anchoring his ideas in the New Testament. He then bridges these ideas to the present time by way of the Book of Mormon. This approach sets his book apart from those that focus on the law of consecration only through more recent history and nineteenth-century revelations. As he explores these three separate standard works, Spencer broadly links previously discrete topics including the law of consecration, the redemption of Israel, and the theology of hope.

Spencer’s exegesis lends insight to the parallel between the law of consecration and the virtue of hope. Readers who imagined that hope was a secondary virtue will here learn of its central importance in the law of consecration—which, as Spencer sees it, is central to the gospel in all dispensations. For humans, hope is an active focus on the perfection that only God can envision for our world. When humans focus on this perfection rather than on objects of desire, they work with God in an “experimental, exploratory” way to bring previously unanticipated perfections to reality (53). Hope grows from faith and leads to love.

Spencer’s discussion is more philosophical than practical, as he signals

early on: “The task I have appointed myself in writing this book is not to determine the way forward; instead, it is simply and solely to *clarify the stakes* of moving forward” (x). Throughout the book, Spencer outlines several important concepts, including the definition of a steward and how it has evolved over time, the many types of hope (faithful, desperate, objective, subjective), and the time of hope (it was not only in Paul’s day; it is now). He also discusses the disconnect between ownership and use. On this subject he joins a conversation that popes and Franciscan monks have held in turn. His conclusion builds on the writings of Hugh Nibley and Steven C. Harper, but he adds an enlightening twist by applying ideas from Giorgio Agamben’s *The Highest Poverty: Monastic Rules and Form-of-Life* (2013).

Memorably, Spencer dispels any accusations that the United Order was holy pre-Marxist communism by making an astute connection: in many ways, the United Order resembled an earlier Christian monastic order. Both of those religious orders were established so that members could “live together in love” (D&C 40:45), the economic consequences following only naturally. Both required that their members give up all private claims to their material wealth before joining, “let all [their] garments be plain” (D&C 42:40), and live a law of chastity. And both promised to “cast out” (D&C 42:20) any unrepentant sinners. In its simplest form, Spencer’s overall message is that Latter-day Saints must “remember the poor” (D&C 42:30). In the end, he foregoes any opportunity to list practical applications, but he makes it clear that now is the time for action and that no one can do our consecrating for us.

Spencer writes conversationally, with a structure that is at once flowing and complex. His argument is well

formulated and his conclusion is earnest. Those interested in and familiar with Mormon theology will find this a refreshing read, while the uninitiated may struggle with the sometimes-intense philosophical web weaving. Either way, Spencer's book adds freshness and credibility to the literature, and his contribution to this topic is noteworthy.

—Lauren McCombs

Plain and Precious Things, by D. John Butler (N.p.: D. John Butler, 2012).

D. John Butler received his law degree from New York University and currently practices law in Idaho. He is also a fiction writer and the author of *The Goodness and the Mysteries: On the Path of the Book of Mormon's Visionary Men*. In *Plain and Precious Things*, Butler casts the beginning of the Book of Mormon in a specific light: Lehi and Nephi as spiritual outsiders looking in on a corrupt Jerusalem. According to Butler, Nephi and Lehi's teachings contradict many of the Jewish doctrines in Jerusalem that are described in the latter part of 2 Kings.

Josiah was the king of Judah and a contemporary to Lehi, and although the Old Testament generally implies in its history that Josiah's reforms are positive, Butler shows, through the lives and visions of Nephi and Lehi, that many of those reforms were corrupt and contributed to Jerusalem's destruction.

Butler takes Nephi at his word about his writings: they were written to restore the "plain and precious things" that had been removed from Hebrew scripture and temple practices. In particular, Lehi's dream and Nephi's vision can be seen as temple visions that corrected and transcended the practices found in Jerusalem's temple. Scholars in biblical studies, particularly Margaret Barker

in *The Older Testament*, have taken a critical look at Josiah's influence and the changes he made to the Jewish temple and religion. Butler's argument is similar, except it is taken from the Book of Mormon and shows 1 Nephi's tree of life visions in the context of the temple—a perspective most readers may not have considered.

Those interested in temple studies will find *Plain and Precious Things* particularly interesting, but any Latter-day Saint will enjoy this book because of its straightforward style and singular interpretation. Butler guides readers through some complex reasoning in a way that is friendly both to lay readers and those who study the temple from a scholarly perspective. This book encourages readers to think deeply and discover new layers of meaning about the temple and tree of life, along with considering the inexhaustible richness of the Book of Mormon.

—Lexi Devenport

Nauvoo & Hancock County, Illinois: A Guide to Family History and Historical Sources, by Kip Sperry. Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, 2014.

For over a century, the LDS and RLDS (now Community of Christ) churches have had an interest in Nauvoo and Hancock County. Among Latter-day Saints, the Nauvoo period is seen as a kind of religious renaissance. It was there that Joseph Smith organized the Relief Society, clarified the nature of the temple and vicarious work for the dead, and forever altered the cosmological view of the Saints through sermons like the King Follett discourse. With so much interest today in what happened 170 years ago on the banks of the Mississippi, Kip Sperry's *A Guide to Family History and Historical Sources* in