4-1-1997

Brief Notices

John A. Tvedtnes
Audrey M. Godfrey
JoAn Bitton
John W. Welch

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/byusq

Part of the Mormon Studies Commons, and the Religious Education Commons

Recommended Citation
Available at: https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/byusq/vol37/iss2/11

This Notice is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at BYU ScholarsArchive. It has been accepted for inclusion in BYU Studies Quarterly by an authorized editor of BYU ScholarsArchive. For more information, please contact ellen_amatangelo@byu.edu.
Brief Notices

*A Peculiar Treasure: Old Testament Messages for Our Day,* by Brent L. Top (Bookcraft, 1997)

If you are looking for a book that will help you understand the history and culture of ancient Israel, buy something else. But if you want to learn how to liken the stories and teachings of the Old Testament to yourself and your family, this is the book. Brent L. Top, associate dean of Religious Education at Brigham Young University, illustrates principles of eternal import by tracing a thread of ancient covenant-keepers—and a few covenant-breakers—from Genesis to the opening of the Christian era. The messages contained in this book are not only timely, but timeless.

Clearly, the author has learned a lesson from Nephi, who likened all scripture—even very ancient scripture—to himself and his people (1 Nephi 19:23–24; 2 Nephi 11:2, 8). Not everyone would read these stories the way Top does, but, then, that’s the nature of likening the scriptures to ourselves.

The book begins by explaining the concept of birthright and covenant in ancient Israel, contrasting those who, like Esau, despised such heavenly blessings with others, such as Joseph and the prophets, who sought to do the Lord’s will. Throughout, Top makes continual reference to God’s desire that his children become “a peculiar treasure” through love, trust, and obedience, in return for which he blesses them. In all this, the book stresses the importance of placing God at the center of our lives in order to gain a perspective of our own role in the divine plan.

Top also makes Old Testament passages relevant to Latter-day Saints by drawing parallels with teachings of modern prophets and personal experiences. The principles are sound and full of hope. If the complexity and historical remoteness of the Old Testament scare you, try reading it with a dose of this book. Then share its teachings in your family and Church circles.

—John A. Tvedtnes


Few recent publications contain as much original research as does this volume of papers delivered at a symposium held in Des Moines, Iowa, in May 1996. The purpose of the symposium was to “identify,
mark, map, and celebrate the historic Mormon Pioneer Trail in southern Iowa” (v). Interestingly, participants included both Mormon and non-Mormon scholars and experienced as well as novice historians, including eighth-grade students. These students, supported by grants from the Iowa Department of Education, spent two summers interviewing longtime residents for oral histories about the Mormons in Iowa and reconnoitering the terrain around Mt. Pisgah on what turned out to be a successful search for signs of the Mormon Trail.

The symposium also included reports from local historians along the Mormon Trail. These reports demonstrate extensive research into pioneer diaries and county and cemetery records, including findings from exploration of the terrain, such as the “footprints” (223) of fence posts indicating boundaries of camps and burial sites, as well as the correct site of the Chariton River Camp. (The straightening and realigning of the river in 1906 had led to the original erroneous identification of the campsite.)

Presentations by well-known LDS scholars examine familiar and also little known aspects of Iowa trail history. James B. Allen discusses the reasons the Saints left Illinois, and Donald Q. Cannon describes the settlements they abandoned. William G. Hartley justifies the ill-timed spring exodus of the Saints in 1846, while Richard E. Bennett defines the exodus as a refining experience that strengthened the Church. Carol Cornwall Madsen presents women’s experience on the Iowa Mormon Trail. Her inclusion of many diary excerpts and valuable information from reminiscent accounts produces an excellent chapter on female travelers.

Sometimes scholars fail to describe Mormon experiences in a worldwide context. Stanley B. Kimball reminds us that the pioneer trek was part of a “westward surge” of many emigrants looking for new land and adventure (86). He categorizes the Mormon travelers into groups such as women, singles, children, and African Americans. Loren N. Horton, retired senior historian of the State Historical Society of Iowa, gives a brief history of events, such as the drive for statehood, that were occurring in Iowa at the same time the vanguard company of Mormon pioneers slogged through the mud.

A discussion of the social life and entertainment of the travelers is also included. William Pitt’s Brass Band buoyed up the spirits of the Saints and earned money by performing in settlements along the trail. The book also contains accounts of hardships in the Nauvoo Poor Camps, which were populated by those forced at gunpoint to leave the city in the fall of 1846.

The editors are to be commended for producing this fascinating volume that provides new and useful information on this less familiar portion of the Mormon pioneer story—the evacuation of Nauvoo and the trek across Iowa to Winter Quarters.

—Audrey M. Godfrey
Pioneer Spirit: Modern-day Stories of Courage and Conviction, by Heidi Swinton (Deseret Book, 1996)

During the sesquicentennial year of 1997, while celebrating the faith and courage of nineteenth-century pioneers, Latter-day Saints were encouraged to recognize that pioneering occurs in many ways and many places. Heidi Swinton’s lively book drives home this point—telling story after story of the pioneering spirit of Saints throughout the world.

The author has published a number of original sketches, energetically conducting oral history interviews and drawing from unpublished material, but she has also summarized many sketches first published in the Church News or in Church magazines. The stories are from all parts of the world; however, the majority come from England, Continental Europe, and Asia, with fewer from South America, Africa, Canada, the United States, and the Pacific Islands. Because it is difficult, if not impossible, to cover the diversity of the modern Latter-day Saint experience in a work of this kind, Pioneer Spirit offers only a sampling.

While the experiences included in this collection are all positive and faith-promoting, they offer numerous examples of trials and challenges. It is easy to feel connected to these new members and modern pioneers. I especially like Swinton’s inclusion of a short, relevant scriptural passage for each of the sketches. This volume is a handy, sprightly collection of personal stories that demonstrate the power of the restored gospel and its capacity to inspire and influence lives for good.

—JoAn Bitton

Voices of Old Testament Prophets (Deseret Book, 1997)

The 26th Annual Sperry Symposium centered on various Old Testament prophets, especially the little-known figures and obscure events in their lives. Interesting details and analyses are included, often for the first time in LDS circles, for example, on the mentoring of Jethro, the rebellion of Korah, the stability of the prophets in the Exile, the saviors referred to by Obadiah, the hopeful stories of Habakkuk and Abigail, and the blessings of the temple in the ministry of Haggai. More familiar themes deal with Isaiah’s indictments, the Millennium, the priesthood, and the eternal nature of the gospel.

The unnamed organizers have succeeded in bringing several new scholars to publication. Some of their names will be as unfamiliar to most readers as are the prophets of whom they write. Readers should enjoy getting to know them all.

—John W. Welch