We Will Still Weep for Zion

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Preliminary Report
"We will still weep for Zion."
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[Note: A new Lamentation Literature is born. Here is the standard scenario: "I am a young hard-working Latter-day Saint; six months ago I was well on the way to financial independence, following the admonitions of my elders. Today I am broke and my children lack necessities. What went wrong?" Maybe the following can explain some things:

**Breaking Away**

In every dispensation of the Gospel, the Lord has insisted on segregating his Covenant people from the rest of the world: if they were not ready to "come out of her, O my people" willingly, he saw to it that the world was more than willing to persecute and expel them.

Two ways were placed before Adam, to see which one he would follow. Cain followed the one, Abel, and after him, Seth, the other. But soon Seth's posterity drifted over to the camp of Cain. Things being very bad, Enoch, the super-missionary, was sent out and he was able "in the process of time" to draw many after him into his city of Zion, which was then totally segregated from the rest of the world pending its destruction.

After the Flood things went bad again, so that the call to Abraham was "lech lecha"—get out of here! And he kept moving all his days; forming his own society as he went, initiating all his followers into a special covenant with God.

The Law of Moses insists before all else that the Chosen people preserve their aloofness from the world by constant purification and instruction: the people must be qadosh = "sanctified," both words having the basic meaning of "cut off," "separated." God has always given his people the same choice of either living up to the covenants made with Him or being in Satan's power; there is no middle ground (Moses 4:4). True, we spend this time of probation in a no man's land between the two camps of Salvation and Damnation, but at every moment of the day and night we must be moving towards the one or the other. Progressive testing takes place along the way in either direction; the same tests in every dispensation and generation mark the progress of the people of God.

1) Do you, first of all, agree to do things HIS way rather than YOUR way— to follow the Law of God? 2) If so, will you be OBEDIENT to Him, no matter what He asks of you? 3) Will you, specifically be willing to SACRIFICE anything He asks you for? 4) Will you at all times behave morally and soberly? 5) Finally, if God asks you to part with your worldly possession by CONSECRATING them all to His work, will you give His own back to Him to be distributed as HE sees fit, not as YOU think wise?

That last test has been by far the hardest of all, and few indeed have chosen that strait and narrow way. The rich young man was careful and correct in observing every point of the law— up to that one; but that was too much for him, and the Savior, who refused to compromise or make a deal, could only send him off sorrowing, observing to the apostles that passing that test was so difficult to those possessing the things of the world, that only a special dispensation from God could get them by.
Here are those that begin to spread out buying up all the land they are able to, to the exclusion of the poor ones who are not so much blessed with the world's goods, thinking to lay a foundation for themselves, only looking to their own individual families and those who are to follow them. Now I want to tell you that Zion cannot be built up in such a way...I see signs put out, beer signs, speculative schemes are being introduced. This is the way of the world, Babylon indeed, and I tell you in the name of the God of Israel, if there is not repentance...and a turning from ungodliness, covetousness, and self-will (i.e., "independence"), you will be broken up and scattered from this choice land to the four winds of heaven." [Joseph Smith (in Ed. Stevenson, Autobiography, pp. 40f)]

Did the people hearken to that voice? As ever, the financial independence "of their own individual families" came first. Brigham Young can tell us how it was: "Saith the Lord to Joseph, 'See if they will give their farms to me.' What was the result? They would not do it, though it was one of the plainest things in the world." "No revelation was ever given more easy of comprehension than that on the Law of Consecration, yet, when the Lord spoke to Joseph, instructing him to counsel the people to consecrate their possessions, and deed them over to the Church in a covenant that cannot be broken, would the people listen to it? No, but they began to find out that they were mistaken, and had only acknowledged with their mouths that the things which they possessed were the Lords." Feigned words were still covering up their covetousness. "I wish to see the people acknowledge the principle of consecration in their works, as well as in their prayers," Brigham continued, "...The Lord makes them well by His power, through the Ordinances of His house, but will they consecrate? No. They say, 'it is mine, and I will have it myself.' There is the treasure and the heart is with it." (J.D. 2:306)

The thing to note here especially is that no one can evade the Law of Consecration on the grounds that it is not clear, still less are we free to give it our own "clarification," identifying Consecration with tithing, gifts to the Church, etc. We should all know by now that there is no limit to the plasticity, adaptability, contrivance and manipulation of economic theory; as St. Augustine says "Oh, what a powerful argumentrix is self-interest!"

"There is another revelation,...stating that it is the duty of all people who go to Zion to consecrate all their property to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints...It was one of the first commandments or revelations given to this people after they had the privilege of organizing themselves as a Church, as the Kingdom of God on earth. I observed then, and I now think, that it will be one of the last revelations which the people will receive into their hearts and understandings, of their own free will and choice, and esteem it as a pleasure, a privilege, and a blessing unto them to observe and keep most holy." (Brigham Young (J.D. 2:299). President Young explains how they got around ignoring the highest and clearest of revelations:
"When the revelation which I have read was given in 1838, I was present...The brethren wished me to go among the churches, and find
boom-town in the worst persecution in their history. "Could our brethren stay in Jackson County, Missouri?" Brigham Young asked a later Conference. "No, No. Why? They had not learned 'a' concerning Zion; and we have been travelling now 42 years and have we learned our a.b.c.?...I will say, scarcely. Have we seen it as a people?" (B.Y. 15:4:1872).

Nauvoo the Bonanza

And so we move on to Nauvoo, where the Prophet began by changing the town's name of Commerce to "Nauvoo the Beautiful" -- a significant shift of emphasis--and followed up by warning the Saints more strenuously than ever, against seeking personal financial independence as a milestone on the Way of Salvation. He lays the strongest emphasis on the importance of distinguishing the two kinds of independence: "And if there are any among you who aspire after their own aggrandizement, and seek their own opulence, while their brethren are groaning in poverty...they cannot be benefited by the intercession of the Holy Spirit..." (TJS, p. 141 - March 25, 1839) [The reader is referred to such recent gems by Mormon authors, as 'How to Prosper during the Coming Bad Years,' and 'Survive & Win in the Inflationary Eighties.']

"...organization of large bodies upon common stock principles... opens a dreadful field for the avaricious, the indolent, and the corrupt hearted to prey upon the innocent and virtuous and honest. They are aspiring men...who had not the substance of godliness about them." But they do make money, and there is prophetic portent for the future in those ominous words: "Every man who is afraid, covetous, will be taken in a snare," for fear and covetousness are the twin offspring of insecurity. To be ambitious and competitive have been the natural tendencies in the New World: "Now, in this world, mankind are naturally selfish, ambitious and striving to excel above one another...some seek to excel. And this was the case with Lucifer when he fell." (TJS, p. 297). To counter that, the Prophet assures us that "The greatest temporal and spiritual blessings which always come from faithfulness and concerted effort, never attend individual exertion or enterprise," (TJS, p. 183), and that "the advancement of the cause of God and the building up of Zion is as much one man's business as another's...party feelings, separate interests, exclusive designs should be lost sight of in the one common cause, in the interest of the whole." (TJS, p. 231) The Saints had entered an order in which even the idealism of Free Masonry "was superseded by a more perfect fraternity found in the vows and covenants which the endowment in the House of God afforded members of the Church. Besides, the Saints learned that they must surrender worldly affiliations, since the world is opposed to the mission of Joseph Smith and his followers...The Church, however, rests upon the rock of revelation and must follow divine guidance rather than precedence," and the laws of the marketplace. (W. Woodruff (Cowley), p. 160).

The sanctity of their calling became a franchise for shenanigans among those brethren in Nauvoo who quickly caught on to the now familiar trick of promoting private business (and later political) interests, with promises of apocalyptic profits, by identifying them with the Church: "We find that there have been frauds and secret
partial observance of the principles of the United Order, which the Saints had before sought to introduce, and still have it in their mission to establish. The people were put on rations, all sharing the same, like members of one great family." (H. C. Kimball (1945), p. 189). "To the hungry Pawnees, they gave freely of their scarce grain. The spirit begotten by such an act of generosity opened the hearts of the Saints for the enjoyment of their conference, and fitted them more perfectly for the worship of God." (W.W., p. 339).

When the crickets and drought struck in 1855 Heber C. Kimball wrote in his Journal, "perhaps many feel a little sober because our bread is cut off, but I am glad of it, because it will be a warning to us... the earth is determined to rest, and it is right that it should." (H.C. Kimball (1945), p. 400). The next year he wrote: "Money will not buy flour or meal... I sell none for money, but let it go where people are truly destitute. Dollars and cents do not count now... some of the people drop many big tears, but if they cannot learn wisdom by precept, nor by example, they must learn it by what they suffer... I wish to God this people would all listen to counsel... and move as one man and be one. If this were the case, our enemies would never have any more power over us, our granaries never would be empty, nor would we see sorrow." (H.C. Kimball, p. 404, 406).

"The design of President Young was that no speculation in lands by the brethren should be allowed whereby the first comers should enrich themselves at the expense of their brethren who should follow... This arrangement prevented any one man from holding a large tract of land near the city, and by so doing prevented speculation by the individual to the detriment of the whole community... In other words, the interest of the whole was to be upper-most in the mind of each man, and the spirit of greed and avarice seldom asserted itself on the part of those noble founders of Utah's great commonwealth." (W.W., p. 317). By present-day standards, Jesse W. Fox, the official surveyor, was woefully deficient in vision, enterprising spirit, and business know-how: "If anyone asked him to select one (tract) for him he promptly refused, saying that... no one by his assistance should ever speculate at the expense of the poor Saints coming to the valley." (W.W., p. 317).

"... the question of consecration was presented." (Conference of April 1856). Heber C. Kimball said, 'I want all I have to be secured in the kingdom of God.' They knew the dangers and temptations of wealth, the selfishness which it begets, as well as the destruction of brotherly love." (W.W., p. 356). The main thing Brother Brigham insisted on in their new home was that they get over the illusion of personal economic independence. "As I have already observed, the people are ignorant... We are here on the earth... and it seems as though we, as individuals, were perfectly independent of every creature or being throughout the immensity of space... we do not fully realize from whence we have received anything we now have in our possession. This is in consequence of our shortsightedness..." (JD 2:300).
before, it was too late—within the year Johnson's army struck. (H.C. Kimball, p. 446). As it approached, in 1857, Brigham Young made an oft-quoted statement: "I am more afraid of covetousness in our Elders than I am of the hordes of hell. Have we men about now of that class? I believe so. I am afraid of such spirits; for they are more powerful and injurious to this people than all hell outside of our borders. All our enemies in the United States or in the world, and all hell marshalled against us, could not do us the injury that covetousness in the hearts of this people could do...for it is idolatry." (JD 5:353:57). And in the next year: "Whether you can see it or not, I know that this people are more or less prone to idolatry; for I see that spirit manifested every day, and hear of it from nearly every quarter." (JD 6:197:58). And so the enemy moved in and the Mormons moved out: "The roads are lined with men, women, children, teams, and wagons—all moving south," wrote Wilfred Woodruff. (W.W., p. 440, April 6, 1858). In this crisis, "...speculators thought they saw an opportunity to make money from the Saints by purchasing their homes in these hours of their distress," thus anticipating those far-sighted Saints of a later day who would write best-selling books on "How to Profit by the Coming Hard Times," (W.W., p. 400) In the first year "the city seemed over-run by speculators and adventurers," (W.W., p. 406) such as "Wardle, Russel, and Miller...a firm of speculators who were making money out of the conditions incident to the presence of the U.S. Army...In 1858 the Chamber of Commerce was organized 'for the purpose of protecting the citizens against the exorbitant prices demanded by those merchants who were taking advantage of the times'"—price control, no less! (W.W., p. 409).

Business not only followed the flag, setting an example for years to follow, it showed the way, "for it is the conduct of traders who have fattened in our midst that has brought an army into our Territory. I would rather see every building and fence laid in ashes than to see a trader come in here with his goods." (JD 7:47:58). "Instead of reflecting upon and searching for hidden things of the greatest value to them, they rather wish to learn how to secure their way through the world as easily and as comfortably as possible. The reflections what they are here for, who produced them, and where they are from, far too seldom enter their minds. [Compromise] (JD 7:282:59).

I Got Mine!

After all their suffering had the Saints learned? In 1860 President Young asked that question: "Are those who have been in the Church twenty-five, or thirty years prepared to have the visions of eternity opened to them? No." (JD 8:164:60). "Instead of being united in our feelings to build up all, each one takes his own course; whereas, if we were united, we would get rich ten times faster than we do now. How are you going to bring a people to that point when they will all be united in the things of this life?
I see men before me, in this house (the St. George Temple) that have no right to be here. They are as corrupt in their hearts as they can be, and we take them by the hand and call them brother." (Manuscript History, 39 '77, 119). "You may think this is plain talk, it is not as plain as you will find by and by. If you should ever go to the gates of heaven, Jesus will say he never knew you. While you have been saying prayers and going to your meetings you are as corrupt in your hearts as men can be...Not but what there are a great majority of the people as good as they know how to be...but show some of the Elders of Israel according to their present conduct a dollar on one side and eternal life on the other, and I fear they would take the dollar." (M.H. 39 '77, 119). "Some of the LDS had an idea that they could take the follies of the world in one hand and the Savior in the other, and expect to get into the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ." (M.H. 35 '73, 275).

"We need not refer to the traditions of the fathers with regard to the manifestations of covetousness we see so much of. Observe the customs and habits of...our brethren and sisters here. We see men from twenty years up to old age who are entirely overcome by a desire to obtain gold...we exhort the people not to be such fools as to run after the golden image; and sometimes we tell them that we will cut them off from the Church if they do. This has caused this great outcry." (M.H. 22 '60, 737). At Conference Brigham Young "advised men not to work so hard that they had to get half drunk in order to keep it up." (M.H. 21 '59, 825).

After the "Reformation" and the Crisis of 1856-8, things went back to normal, with the usual drift in the usual direction. Brigham Young in 1867: "The Latter-day Saints, in their conduct and acts with regard to financial matters, are like the rest of the world. The course pursued by men of business in the world has a tendency to make a few rich, and to sink the masses of the people in poverty and degradation. Too many of the elders of Israel take this course. No matter what comes, they are for gain--for gathering around them riches." (JD 11:348).

In the "Gilded Age" of the 1870's Brigham Young never ceased to plead and explain: "Will he ever grant power to His Saints on the earth? Yes...but in the capacity they are now, in the condition that they now present themselves before God, before the world and before each other? Never, Never!" (JD 15:2:72). And next year: "Do the people understand it? Scarcely! Scarcely!...How is it? Are not the sordid things of this life before our eyes, and have they not thrown a mist before them so that we can not see?" (JD 15:3:1872) "How long shall we travel, and how long shall we live, how long shall God wait for us to sanctify ourselves and become one in the Lord, in our actions and in our ways for building up of the kingdom of God, that he can bless us?" (JD 15:4:1872) "...the Lord is merciful to us, that he still remembers us, that he is still feeling after us, and that he is sending forth his voice—the voice of his Spirit, unto the hearts of his people, crying unto them—'Stop! Stop your course! Cease to bring in and build up
death of Brigham Young, in 1882, President Taylor hesitantly permitted "some of our brethren to branch out into business on their own." That the idea was not his own, and that he had serious reservations is clear from the official letter:

Babylon Delivered (Again!)

"A feeling had been manifested by some of our brethren (it was their idea) to branch out into the mercantile business on their own account [independence at last], and his [President Taylor's] idea, as to that, was, if people would be governed by correct principles laying aside covetousness and eschewing chicanery and fraud, dealing honestly and conscientiously with others as they would like others to deal with them, that there would be no objection on our part for our brethren to do these things; that it was certainly much better for them to embark in such enterprises than our enemies."
(J.L. Arrington, Great Basin Kingdom, p. 314).

Far from being a commandment, the change was only permitted with uneasy reservations; the reluctance of the "no objection" concession is apparent in the argument that free enterprise would be even less desirable if it was the prerogative of the enemies in our midst. Would the new enterprises be "laying aside covetousness?" What was their purpose if not to acquire wealth? As to "eschewing fraud and chicanery," which is still the plea to this day, has not the experience of the past shown that such appeals are as futile as giving a small boy a drum with the sober admonition to play it softly forever after?

What had happened to sidetrack the United Order? A recent in-depth economic history of the times explains:

"During this period of the 1870's, astute businessmen gradually gained control of the cooperatives and replaced cooperative methods of retailing with methods closer to pure private enterprise. In the process these new owners completely changed the character of the companies; though they often kept the company name the same in order to take advantage of the local appeal the cooperatives still held...."

Retaining the name might be considered a stroke of genius were it not so very obvious; the religious note had to be retained in the Territory, and few will protest today that the stately emblem of ZCMI breathes either the unworldly aroma of Zion or the tainted breath of a true cooperative.

"By the mid-eighties, most of the stock of the cooperatives [which needed large sums of money to buy machinery made only in the East and abroad] had been sold to a few businessmen who now controlled
in outspoken contempt for the environment, unabashed reverence for wealth, and ardent advocacy of military expansion.

On various occasions Brigham Young made it perfectly clear that no possible grounds remain for evading or postponing the Law of Consecration; there is nothing to argue or temporize about, the clarifying and explaining have all been done. It has been repeatedly presented to the people in the most clear and unequivocal terms—and flatly rejected by them. Not by a show of hands—that would have been perfectly permissible—but by proclaiming by word and deed after leaving the meetings that they had no intention of keeping certain parts of the Law. Notice how Israel and the Saints of every age, when called to keep the Law are reminded that unless they live up to every point of the agreement the whole covenant will be nullified—it is the whole Law or nothing. The Saints covenanted and promised to observe it with the clear understanding that God is not to be mocked in these things, and that the only alternative to living up to every item of covenants made with him is to be in Satan's power (Mos. 4:4). Which is where we are today, along with the rest of the world. It is the stubborn insistence on having it both ways, keeping parts of the Law that contain them while putting the rest on hold, that generates those crippling contradictions that mark our present condition.

If Brigham Young could say in 1877 that "the Latter-day Saints present a strange spectacle to those that enjoy the spirit of revelation," today the spectacle is unfolding to all the world. Economists, journalists, political analysts, sociologists, historians, psychologists and not least of all General Authorities have all had occasion in the present year to offer explanations for the paradoxical phenomenon of "Utah the Fraud Capital of the World." If you have followed our little history there is nothing paradoxical about it. Almost all of the experts agree that the cause of the thing lies in a strange combination of goodness, gullibility and greed among the people who have always "like Israel of old," to quote President Woodruff, "associated certain worldly successes with their ideas of right, and misfortune with their ideas of wrong." Since the beginning the Saints have been under the necessity of frequent routine warnings against "the hard-sell techniques of men not interested in truth, who insist that the acquisition of wealth is a state of blessedness." (1 Tim. 6:5). The King James translators, innocent of the economic jargon of a decadent society, gave the passage a more philosophic turn, but just as damning: "Perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of truth, supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself." The urgent warning, indeed the whole Epistle, shows that such men were influential and dangerous in the Church; and all Paul could do about it was to advise his hearers to steer clear of them.

What can we look forward to now? "Happy is the man whom God correcteth!" If the Lord still loves the Saints, he will treat them as before and give them some very rough times indeed to bring them to their senses. Meanwhile the constant cry of their great leader Brigham Young still reverberates in the hearts of the faithful: How long, O Lord? How long will it be? "...we may travel for many years before the sunshine appears. It does not yet appear to this people,
with the Spirit by which the Kingdom must be built up, and rebukes those Saints who insisted that they could sustain the one in the spirit of the other. It is time to give up that pious sophistry. So here is the answer to our question, What has gone wrong? The Lord has not let you down after all your plans and exertions. You have let Him down by all your plans and exertions.

A Note on Being Independent

God has announced that he has a plan to prepare for himself special people and to make his Church "independent above all other creatures beneath the celestial world" (D&C 78:14). We get as far as the word "independent" and, without reading another syllable farther, declare our resolution to get rich and thereby achieve the independence God wants us all to have.

But if God has a plan, why not let Him tell us what it is? instead of cutting him off in the middle of a sentence the way Cain did when he saw that God's plan would interfere with his own plans for getting rich (Mos. 5:26ff).

The Lord speaks of the Church's being independent—nothing about the individual; and of independence but only of the powers here below "Beneath the celestial world," not of orders from above. He makes it all very clear: It is my plan—not yours! (D&C 78:14). "It is my purpose to provide for my saints, for all things are mine. But it must needs be done in mine own way, that I, the Lord, have decreed to provide for my saints." (D&C 104:15ff). The plan is a heavenly one, given as a special blessing to the elect, God's own people, to set them apart from the rest of the world—there is no human invention about it. But that one word, "independent" is enough to set us off after the way of the world, interposing our own plan right in the middle of the sentence, so that it will look like his, not even bothering to consider what the Lord has in mind. And what do we come up with? Nothing in the world but the old familiar run-of-the-mill Capitalism—the world's way after all. Is this what the Lord has been holding in reserve for his people?

"It must needs be done in mine own way," says the Lord, and in the very same sentence gives us as the essence of that plan, "that the poor shall be exalted and the rich are made low." (D&C 104:16)—all brought to the same economic level—so that we all have "sufficient for our needs," which is quite enough for anyone. The idea is "that you may be equal in the bonds of heavenly things, yea and in earthly things also... For if ye are not equal in earthly things ye cannot be equal in obtaining heavenly things." (D&C 78:5ff). It is nothing more nor less than a redistribution of the wealth... for it is not given that one man should possess that which is above another..." (D&C 49:20). As Brigham Young put it, "the underlying principle...was that there should be no rich and no poor."

Now Joseph Smith knew as well as anyone that "If we were equal in property at present in six months we should be worse (off) than
wagon were in such great demand that he could easily make from 200 to 500 percent profit on them. . . and prices were increasing every day." "It fairly made my head swim, and Satan whispered in my ears, 'Why not remain another year, and trade and speculate and get rich; and then you can assist the poor Saints, the widow and the orphan, and take them up to Zion. . . the people already there are hard put to it to sustain themselves.' In this manner I was tried, and sorely too." Note who was reasoning so piously and wisely, like Judas protesting his lively concern for the poor (Jn 12:4-6)—it was Satan. This reasoning caused Bro. Hammond "great perplexity of mind"—what was he to do? A vision that came to him on three successive nights solved the problem. In it, he was shown a terrible threat that hung over all those so diligently seeking gold on the river, and after the third revelation "When I awoke. . . my mind was perfectly clear, and I felt to thank the Lord. . . that He had thus warned me. . . to flee from that land and gather with His people. . . and learn to be obedient to His commands. . ." The Lord had made clear that he is not pleased with the familiar sophistry of getting-rich-to-help-the-Church. (N.B. Lundwall, Faith Like the Ancients. (Manti: 1968) II, 121-3.