



*Saints: The Standard of Truth, 1815–1846.* Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2018.

## Getting to Know Saints: The Story of the Church of Jesus Christ in the Latter Days

STEVEN C. HARPER, SCOTT HALES, AND CASEY PAUL GRIFFITHS

Steven C. Harper ([sharper@ldschurch.org](mailto:sharper@ldschurch.org)) is the historical editor of *Saints*.

Scott Hales ([scott.hales@ldschurch.org](mailto:scott.hales@ldschurch.org)) is the literary editor for *Saints*.

Casey Paul Griffiths ([casey\\_griffiths@byu.edu](mailto:casey_griffiths@byu.edu)) is an assistant teaching professor of Church history and doctrine at BYU.

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**Griffiths:** *The purpose of this meeting is to explain a little bit about what Saints is and how teachers can use it. Scott, can I start with you? Can you tell us a little bit about Saints and what it is intended to do?*

**Hales:** *Saints* is a new four-volume narrative history of the Church. It covers Church history from 1815 to the present. Each volume culminates in the completion of a temple and shows Latter-day Saints making and keeping sacred covenants. The first volume covers the organization of the Church and the early years of the Restoration. It begins in 1815 and ends in 1846 with the Nauvoo Temple and the endowment of the Saints there. The second volume depicts the challenges of gathering the Saints to the Salt Lake Valley and the Intermountain West. It ends in 1893 with the dedication of the Salt Lake Temple. Volume 3 shows the Church entering the twentieth century and branching out beyond the Mormon corridor. It concludes in 1955 with the dedication of the Swiss Temple, the first temple dedicated in Europe. Finally, volume 4 is about the global Church. By the end of that volume, temples dot the earth and sacred ordinances are available to all worthy Saints.

**Griffiths:** *In 2015 there are almost 150 temples. It must be difficult to choose from that long a list!*

**Hales:** By that point it is impossible to focus on just one temple because there are so many. What we really want to show at the end of volume 4 is that it is now possible for saints in all parts of the world to visit temples without traveling great distances. We tell stories in volumes 2 and 3 about Saints making great sacrifices and covering vast distances to get to temples. By the end of volume 4 that's no longer the case. Saints from around the world are closer to temples and temple covenants than ever before.

**Griffiths:** *Steve, if I can pivot to you for just a second, there is a long tradition of writing history in the Church. Joseph Smith began his manuscript history in 1838, and then B. H. Roberts's Comprehensive History of the Church was written in the early twentieth century. I've heard Saints spoken of as being related to the Comprehensive History. We are approaching the bicentennial of the organization of the Church. Was this part of a project to update the Comprehensive History or create a new history that covers the second century of the Latter-day Saints?*

**Harper:** *Saints* is a four-volume representative history, not a comprehensive history. It is also not a history of the institutional Church but rather a representative history of the Latter-day Saints. But the project began as an investigation into the feasibility of updating the *Comprehensive History*. In 2008 the Church Historian, who was then Elder Marlin K. Jensen of the Seventy, made a proposal to the First Presidency to update it. The First Presidency authorized the Church History Department to come up with a plan to do it. A committee was called together and proposed the four-volume plan that Scott just spoke about. Elder Steven E. Snow of the Seventy has served as the Church Historian since 2012. He made *Saints* a high priority. He has led and inspired us and has kept the other General Authorities informed about *Saints*.

**Griffiths:** *Could you elaborate a little bit more on what you mean by representative history as opposed to a comprehensive history?*

**Harper:** A comprehensive history is everything that's ever been gathered or will be gathered. Richard E. Turley Jr., who was an Assistant Church Historian when the project began, and who in many ways served as the inspired heart and mind behind the project, explained it by drawing a pyramid on the board to help us catch the vision. He drew a line an inch down the pyramid to show that the tip of the pyramid is what *Saints* is trying to

cover. Everything else, everything underneath it, every source behind it, every supplemental essay, every recorded interview, et cetera, is the comprehensive history of the Church. In some ways everything the Church History Department does is to create a comprehensive history, but these four volumes are just the tip of that iceberg. They are designed to be intensely readable. They are not, with all due respect to B. H. Roberts, whom I admire greatly, in his style. We haven't even labeled them history. The title is *Saints: The Story of the Church of Jesus Christ in the Latter Days*. This was partly because we didn't want people who have a negative association with history to think that these books are not for them. These books are for them.

**Griffiths:** *I noticed this in my use of Saints. I hope this isn't a violation of protocol, but I gave a preliminary copy to my wife, who is an avid reader but not an avid historical reader. She doesn't enjoy reading the same sort of material that I enjoy as a Church history professor. We were on a car trip, and she picked it up and didn't put it down until about three hours later. She told me, "All right, I can get on board with this because it doesn't have thirty footnotes on every page." She actually said, "I hope this isn't an odd comparison, but I felt more like I was reading Harry Potter."*

**Hales:** It's designed to be a history for people who don't like history. It's meant to be very inviting, very engaging, very approachable. Some people hear the word "history" and clam up or tune out. They think about boring high school history classes or history lectures. That's not the reaction we want from our readers. We want people to read this book! We have written it in a way that will appeal to people from ages 12 to 112. We have been very deliberate in how we present the material so that it is accessible to a wide variety of people from all ages, all educational backgrounds, and all reading levels.

**Harper:** We've heard from lots of reviewers and readers from various demographics and areas of the world who say something very similar to your wife. We're gratified by that. It means that our aim from the beginning is being realized. We've also heard from some reviewers who think that *Saints'* readability means that it is unsophisticated or irresponsible or made up, and we want to reassure every one of them that none of those things is the case. It is based on deep research. It relies on the best historians after double-checking their work. Every line in the book has been triple and quadruple checked for accuracy. Every claim is historically sound and derived from sources that we've verified and triangulated. We've been careful in the way we use source material even inside of a source. We won't make a blanket judgment

about a source like Lucy Mack Smith's memoir, for example, in which some passages are more verifiable than others. We are quite careful about what we use and how we use it. We want readers to understand that they can rely on this history. It's accurate. It's a true story.

**Griffiths:** *But it is different from what B. H. Roberts tried to do in the sense that you're saying this isn't comprehensive. Who is the primary audience that it aims for? Who would this work be most useful to?*

**Harper:** Scott can answer that question best. Let me preface it a little to help people discern one difference between the experience of reading *Saints* as compared to reading Roberts's *Comprehensive History*. Here's an analogy Richard Turley made while he was the executive editor of the project. He is now the managing director of the Church's Public Affairs Department, but he was a visionary and a leader of the project as it took shape. He used to say that we want to create an experience for readers that is like watching a terrifically engrossing movie. What we *don't* want to happen is for one of us to come out on to the stage, raise the lights in the middle of the movie, and say, "Ladies and gentlemen, let us dissertate for you and tell you what the movie means and how the story is going to unfold." B. H. Roberts stopped the story on every page and dissertated. He provided exposition. He told us what the history meant. *Saints* doesn't work that way.

**Griffiths:** *You would differentiate this from something like *The Work and the Glory* in that it's really readable but that it's absolutely 100 percent nonfiction?*

**Hales:** I think that comparison is inevitable because both series are written in such a simple, accessible style. But the key difference is that *The Work and the Glory* is a work of fiction and *Saints* is a work of non-fiction. Readers will not find a fictional family like the Steeds in *Saints*. Instead, they'll find the Peter and Mary Maughan family, who lived in Nauvoo in the 1840s. They'll find the families of Phoebe and Wilford Woodruff and Louisa and Addison Pratt. These were all real people, real families. If readers want to, they can go to other history books and learn more about them. Of course, we use the techniques of storytelling to share their lives and experiences. Storytelling has a way of entertaining readers and instructing them at the same time—something academic history does not always do well. Good stories are about people who have goals, encounter problems, make choices to resolve their problems, and deal with the consequences of their choices until they achieve whatever they set out to achieve. Readers will encounter this pattern in *Saints*. And they will respond positively to it because we like seeing people make

decisions and solve problems. That is what we do in real life. That's why narrative history is so important. It helps readers see themselves in the history and imagine what it was like to be somebody like Wilford Woodruff or Joseph Smith or Louisa Pratt.

**Griffiths:** *One of the advantages of having fictional characters is you have a little more control of what they're going to do. Where you've got somebody like Addison Pratt that, as you know, goes on a mission in the Pacific and sort of gets into trouble that adds a layer of complexity to your story.*

**Hales:** Absolutely. I think that is one of the challenges of the work that I do as literary editor on the project. I'm tasked with figuring out how to take the stories that we find in the historical record and fit them into a narrative. I can't make anything up. I can't invent details. I can't assign motivations to Joseph Smith that he did not record in his letters or journals. I'm limited in my ability to go inside his head and explain why he did this or that. So anytime you see a character's thoughts or motivations expressed in *Saints* it is because we have a historical source that allows us to do so. It would be very easy for me, as a creative writer, if I could just make up details. But I can't do that.

**Griffiths:** *It would be easy, you know, and I've thought the same thing as I've been writing!*

**Harper:** From the very beginning of the project, everybody that has ever had a role in it was told the Lord's direction about who the intended audience is. In section 47 of the Doctrine and Covenants, the Lord says to keep the Church history *continually*. This is the rationale for a new history, another history. You don't write it once for all. The work B. H. Roberts did was fantastic and timely, but it doesn't serve present purposes very well. The prophets who guide us into the future directed us to write a new history. Doctrine and Covenants 69 says that the history should be written "for the good of the church, and for the rising generations" (D&C 69:8). *Saints* was primarily written for the rising generations of Latter-day Saints. I've heard people mistakenly say it's a kid's book, and that's definitely not true. Kids can read it, but it's not a kid's book. Youth will find it accessible. Adults will find it sophisticated.

**Hales:** Young people today want to know more about Church history because they encounter controversies online or historically based criticism of the Church. I think young people want to understand these issues better for themselves and also to help others who encounter them. But they don't quite



know where to turn, and sometimes they begin a little research, but maybe the history itself just comes across as too dense or not quite targeted toward them. Scholars have written a great deal about the Church, and studying their work can help us understand Church history better. But not all of it is the most readable material. Some people find it intimidating.

**Griffiths:** *I had a member of my ward approach me and ask, “What’s the first book I should read on Church history?” The best I could come up with is Church History in the Fulness of Times, which is approachable but still a little bit challenging.*

**Hales:** We want *Saints* to reach the most people possible, to become the go-to place for Church members to receive a foundational understanding of Church history. *Saints* can also serve as a springboard into a deeper study of Church history, if that’s what readers want from it. Each volume is well researched and well documented. We invited readers who wish to expand their understanding of Church history to go to our endnotes, look up the sources, and learn more.

**Griffiths:** *At BYU we have a lot of students that come in and are trying to understand more complex or maybe more surprising aspects of Church history, things like seer stones or different accounts of the First Vision. How would *Saints* be a resource that would help them kind of deal with and manage some of those things that sometimes disturb people?*

**Harper:** *Saints* deals with all the challenging issues in a narrative way. Seer stones are in there, but you don’t get a deep dive into seer stones in the book itself. There are footnotes to topical essays that take readers to supplemental materials that go as deep as a person can go. Those will all be online. A person reading the electronic version is within a few clicks of viewing the raw source material and really reliable essays. That is true for all of the topics that just about anybody could want to investigate further: Some are about controversial topics, some are just interesting, some will be uninteresting to most people, but somebody somewhere along the way will want to know more. Matt McBride and his team have prepared both video and print materials just for them.

**Griffiths:** *Do you imagine the average person reading this on their phone? In what ways does that change the experience?*

**Hales:** I think so. For as long as I’ve been on the project, *Saints* has been something that could be accessed through a variety of technologies. We are going to publish the book in a traditional paperback format, but we’ll also

make an e-book available on a variety of digital platforms, including the Gospel Library app. In fact, I think the Gospel Library will be the best place to experience *Saints*. The ebook will have embedded links that will direct readers to supplemental essays on church history topics and digital images of our sources. But even people who don’t like ebooks will be able to find *Saints* in a format they prefer. People today consume written material all sorts of ways. We’ll have audiobooks of the volumes for people who like audiobooks.

**Griffiths:** *I noticed already the first chapter in Gospel Library has the little headphone link and you could just click on it and start listening to it.*

**Hales:** Yes, and if you prefer a male reader, we have a male reader. If you prefer a female reader, we have a female reader. We really are trying to make it as available as possible.

**Harper:** Elder Steven E. Snow, Church Historian and Recorder, made a thrilling announcement in the February 2018 *Ensign*, saying, “The four volumes will be published in 14 languages in book form (available at store.lds.org), online at saints.lds.org, and in the Gospel Library app. They will also be available in e-book and audiobook formats in selected languages.” That means the text will reach more than 98 percent of Latter-day Saints on the planet. And selected chapters have been translated into more than forty languages. The audiobooks will be at least in Spanish and Portuguese besides English. From its opening scene to its worldwide distribution, *Saints* signals to God’s children everywhere that it is for and about them. It is the story of how they relate to a God who, knowing the calamities of their lives (D&C 1:17–22), called a teenager to renew the covenants that don’t eliminate sorrow, suffering, and separation by death but sanctify and endow each of those obstacles with transcendent meaning and guarantee that the same sociality that exists among us here will exist among us there, only coupled with eternal glory (D&C 130:2). It will enlarge the Saints’ memory in sacramental ways and assist them in always remembering the Savior.

**Hales:** Can I return to what Steve said about *Saints*’ treatment of challenging issues? These books will serve the people who have questions about the history. I think one of the best things *Saints* will do is let readers know that it is OK to talk about these things, that it’s OK to have questions, that it’s OK to talk about seer stones or plural marriage. These things are part of our past and they are important to understand. I think *Saints* will help readers and Church members feel more comfortable with these issues.

**Griffiths:** *I've noticed in my classes it's less, "I don't believe in seer stones." The discomfort seems to come from, "Oh, I've never heard of the seer stone before" or "Why didn't I know about this?" I hope that it introduces these ideas in a safe and approachable way.*

**Hales:** We're hoping that, within ten years, things like seer stones will no longer be strange, that they will be a part of who we are—a part of our vocabulary as Latter-day Saints.

**Griffiths:** *Tell me a little bit about the selection process. How do you choose? There is so much Church material. It must have been really especially challenging when you get into the twentieth century, you're not just talking about a couple dozen families you're talking about a couple thousand families, and then several million. How do you decide what to use and not to use?*

**Hales:** That's a huge challenge. It gets harder as we go along. As the Church gets bigger, there are so many stories to tell. Before we started writing each volume, we sat down and discussed the essentials of each era. What were the most important events? Who were the most important people? These are the nonnegotiable aspects of the history. If we don't include them in our narrative, it's not going to be a representative history. We also identified our story arc. These stories are about Latter-day Saints building temples and making covenants. So we looked around for stories that help us develop that arc. Over time we have come up with three criteria for story selection. One is that a historical event or figure has to be inherently interesting, because if they aren't it is going to be a really boring book. The second thing is that they have to fit the story arc. And finally, they have to help us show change in the Church over time. We have to ask, "Are these events or figures crucial to understanding what the Church is or who we are as Latter-day Saints?" And that's essentially it. We find lots of great stories. Sometimes they fit our criteria; sometimes they don't. It can be really sad to leave certain stories on the cutting room floor, but I think that the stories we've selected so far do a great job of being representative of the story of the Latter-day Saints.

**Griffiths:** *Steve, can you offer some advice to teachers about how to use Saints? You've taught in the Church History Department, and what would you say to teachers about how they should use Saints? What was your vision in mind as to how it would work?*

**Harper:** For many years, including in a BYU–Hawaii devotional in January 2017 titled "Faith Is Not Blind," Elder Bruce C. Hafen has been talking about "the gap." He explains that we begin with a kind of naive faith, a

childlike faith, which is good. But it will not withstand the rigors and forces of the word in which we live unless it grows up with us and becomes mature faith. There is a gap between naive faith and the cynicism we might develop when we see things as they really are. If we pay attention we are going to discover that some of our naive assumptions aren't true. We are going to run up against facts of history that cause us to rethink assumptions of our naive faith.

In the face of those facts, we have choices to make. Do I still believe? What is it that I believe? Some people turn to cynicism at this point. They make the decision that because the facts are not what they assumed they should be they can't believe anymore that God chose prophets or restored his priesthood through them or that they lead and guide us according to his will. As Elder Hafen shows, however, and as I and many others have experienced personally, we can mature past cynicism to informed faith.

*Saints* is very intentionally designed to help people through the gap. It is supposed to help people bridge the gap that they must pass from naive faith to informed faith. There is no way through that gap that doesn't create some dissonance or tension between *what I thought was* or *what I thought should be* and *what actually was* or *what is*. "Truth is knowledge of things as they are, and as they were, and as they are to come" (D&C 93:24). *Saints* tells the truth about the past, about "things . . . as they were." It's a truth in which we can have great faith. It's a truth that will challenge some naive assumptions about the past. But it will also see readers safely through to a resolution. The problems of the past resolve. The best example in our history is Joseph Smith's First Vision. He had a problem, a crisis, a need for redemption. That's a problem we all have. The inciting incident in Joseph's story came of his reading James 1:5. He acted in faith on that revelation and was powerfully opposed, so much so that he had to choose whether to sink into despair or call on God. He chose to exert all his power to call upon God for deliverance. The rest is history in at least two senses. First, Joseph's First Vision is the inciting incident to all four volumes of *Saints*. Joseph's choice to act in faith and call upon God when he was opposed by the adversary launches the latter-day quest for each of us to seal the relationship between us and our Heavenly Parents, to feel their love and forgiveness and to continue in their plan for our redemption and exaltation.

My advice to teachers is to not just have students read some passages but to use the entire book as a bridge for students to safely cross from naive faith, experience the dissonance in a nurturing environment, and experience

resolution. Some dissonance is not the enemy of faith. It is part of our mortal experience in the plan of salvation. It enables us to exercise agency to choose informed faith or not. *Saints* is written in such a way that the dramatic tension in the story corresponds to the dissonance we experience as we make the trip from naive faith to informed faith. The book is therapeutic. The book is sacred. It will do sacred work in people's lives as they choose to exercise faith in the truth the story tells.

**Griffiths:** *I think sometimes there is a tendency on the part of teachers to want to kind of protect their students, to keep them away from things that can be challenging or difficult.*

**Harper:** We used to quarantine our people or the information that we thought could harm their faith. In the information age you can't quarantine. You immunize. You introduce people to the material in the right formula, the right proportions, the right strengths and doses so that they actually become resilient and immune rather than increasingly vulnerable to sinister efforts to undermine their faith and happiness. *Saints* fortifies faith.

**Hales:** And I would add that in order to achieve the kind of understanding Steve is referring to, in order to get the most out of *Saints* and benefit from its testimony of the plan of salvation, in order to get the most out of its witness of the Prophet Joseph Smith and Jesus Christ, you need to read the *whole* book. *Saints* isn't a textbook or a manual, so it should not be treated like one. My background is in teaching literature, so I see *Saints* being used the way any literary text might be used in an English class. I see it as a catalyst for meaningful gospel discussions. Students and teachers can discuss not only the doctrinal content in the text, but also the significance of the stories themselves. Classes can talk about the dilemmas of the early Saints, the choices they made, and the consequences of those choices. I see students and teachers likening the stories in *Saints* unto themselves. For this reason, I think teachers ought to encourage students to read the whole volume. You really need the *whole* story to unfold in order for you to get the most out of it—and for the spirit to work through it. The narrative format demands that we show people at various stages of conflict, of working through their problems.

**Harper:** Which is historical.

**Hales:** It's how we experience life. *Saints* is meant to take readers on a journey. There will be times when certain passages in the narrative will unsettle them or leave them with unanswered questions. We want them to keep reading to resolve their concerns, find answers to their questions, and see how

the entire journey fits together. If readers only experience *Saints* in pieces, they will not have access to its full power.

**Harper:** We tested the first volume. Hundreds of people read it, or read parts of it, three or four chapters at a time, and returned comments on it. One of the patterns that emerged from those comments is just what Scott has said. One of the clear lessons from seeing what happened when people read three or four chapters at a time is that they wanted more. They wanted to know how the problems resolved and how the characters decide to act in response to the challenges of their lives and how they find redemption through the ordinances of the Lord's house. When people only have a few chapters they want the rest and there's some danger in just reading a piece of it and thinking you know the whole story. One reviewer was disappointed because the few chapters they were given weren't forthcoming about a particularly challenging issue. What this reader could not realize is that earlier chapters told the very story they thought had been censored. That reader and others will benefit very much from reading the whole story.

**Griffiths:** *Would you caution teachers to say, "We are going to get through everything, but make sure that you read the whole thing." What do you mean by the whole thing? Are you talking volumes here? All four volumes?*

**Hales:** Both, I suppose. Each volume is designed to be its own journey, but it's also a leg in a much longer journey. Each volume will feel like a complete story with a beginning, middle, and an end. But the full trajectory of the Restoration will not become clear until you have read all four volumes. Of course, I understand that instructors can't cover everything in class, but my hope is that instructors will encourage their students to read the entire book, cover to cover, outside of class.

**Griffiths:** *Because of earlier conversations we had, I knew it was going to be four volumes. But only one volume covers the Joseph Smith era, which is where we tend to place all of our emphasis. The introductory class that I teach the church history just basically covers Joseph Smith. This has three volumes post Joseph Smith and heads into the global Church, which is really complex. Are there examples of stories like, where, let's say, an African American family that is in the Church around the time of the priesthood revelation in 1978 or things like that? What are some of the best stories that popped out at you when you were putting it together?*

**Hales:** Well, that question is a little difficult to answer because we are still working on that volume! We have an excellent group of historians and

researchers who work with us who are finding stories about families in Africa or other parts of the world. I think readers will be thrilled with these stories. As a Church, we know about people like Joseph Smith and Brigham Young, but what *Saints* will do is introduce us to a whole new cast of characters. People that we—the writers and historians—are just now discovering for the first time. One of the interesting people that we’ve come across for volume 3 is a young German woman during World War II. She actually served a mission in Berlin during the War. Her experience coming of age as a Latter-day Saint against the horrors of Nazi Germany is both fascinating and faith promoting. And one neat thing about her is that she is still alive. We’ve been able to meet with her and ask her questions and learn more about her experience and gain more details that we can include in the history.

**Griffiths:** *She served a mission during the war in Germany? I didn’t know there were any missionaries called during the war.*

**Harper:** She was a local member. After the American missionaries went home, the Saints on the ground filled the gaps.

**Hales:** She was working in the mission office in Berlin. It’s an incredible story.

**Griffiths:** *I have to say that one thing I appreciated about the chapters that I was able to read was a very diverse number of viewpoints. A lot of stories from women. A lot of stories from families that I wasn’t familiar with—the Maughan family, for instance. Did you make a direct attempt to try and include diverse, non-American, female, different ethnicities, different backgrounds in the selection of stories that you chose to put in the book?*

**Hales:** Yes. At our weekly outlining and planning meetings, we take a look at what stories we have, and if none of the stories add to the volume’s diversity, we go back to the archive and look for stories that help us better reflect the range of experiences within the Church. We know there are many voices and many points of view in the Church, and we want to show that in the history. If we find that our narrative is not leaning in that direction, then we go back and keep looking.

**Harper:** My sister-in-law texted, “The first chapter in the *Ensign* is fantastic! I loved seeing how strong Lucy [Mack Smith] was—to me she was the best part of this chapter.” We’ve heard things like that a lot from readers.

**Hales:** One of the things that we hear consistently from reviewers is “Thank you for these stories.” Thank you for the stories of these women, these men we’ve never heard about. In volume 1 we meet Lewis Dana, one of the

first Native American members of the Church. We meet Nabota and Telii, two of the first members of the Church in the South Pacific. We wish we had more information about them. Unfortunately, we don’t write as much from their perspectives because the available sources don’t allow it. But if we find an underrepresented perspective and the source material is rich enough, we try to include it in the history.

**Griffiths:** *Knowing that this is different than what we think of traditionally as history, can you tell me a little bit about the team that put *Saints* together? You have historians, like Steve here, who is pretty accomplished in his field. Scott, what is your background?*

**Hales:** My background is in American literature. I have a PhD in literature with a focus on fiction. I wrote my dissertation on Mormon novels. Steve can probably tell the history of the project better than I can. Historians wrote the first draft of volume 1, and when they finished it, they sent it out to the reviewers. How would you characterize their response, Steve? You were there.

**Harper:** The draft sounded like a bunch of historians were trying to do creative writing. We sent it to our reviewers; we had some really great in-house reviewers, most influentially James Goldberg. As politely as possible, they said, “The idea here is really good, but the execution of it is not working. You can’t do creative writing if you’re not trained in creative writing.” So the next thing we did was to recruit fantastic creative writers. We figured out who the very best ones for the job were, and we asked them to come and get involved. That’s how Scott became the literary editor. It is his voice that gives *Saints* the uniform style.

**Hales:** My job is to maintain a consistent style, tone, and voice in the narrative.

**Harper:** There’s also an underlying architecture which readers in-the-know will discern right away, but most readers will enjoy the book without ever really knowing the underlying architecture is there. The literary architecture is what the historians could not accomplish, designing it the right way so that it reads like a fantastic narrative. It wasn’t until we had really good collaboration between historians and creative writers that we were able to get it where we needed to go.

**Hales:** We have a strong team of historians and creative writers. We meet together often and work well together. We’ve all figured out our place on the team. It was a little rocky at first trying to get historians and creative writers to speak the same language and stop trying to do each other’s jobs. We had a



lot of stumbles early on, and I credit the Lord and the influence of the Spirit, because once we figured out what we were doing and what our roles were, the team began to work very efficiently. I love coming to work every day. It's such a creative environment.

**Harper:** Our leaders are Elder Steven E. Snow, the Church Historian and Recorder and our Executive Director; Elder Devn J. Cornish, Assistant Executive Director of the Department; and Reid L. Neilson, managing director of the Church History Department and Assistant Church Historian and Recorder. Matthew Grow is the director of publications at the Church History Library and one of the general editors of *Saints*. He is closely involved in all aspects of the project. They have all been tremendously supportive. Reid first became involved with *Saints* as a member of the committee set up by Elder Jensen to propose the organizing principles and scope of the project.

**Griffiths:** *It is kind of unique. The Comprehensive History was really kind of a one-man show, but the History of the Church was really quite collaborative, though they wrote in the voice of Joseph Smith. It seems like this is more of that kind of effort than the Comprehensive History was.*

**Hales:** Joseph, as you know, felt inadequate when he tried to keep the commandment to keep his history, and so he went and got talented writers to help do the job.

**Griffiths:** *Our time is just about up. Any final thoughts?*

**Hales:** I have great faith in the ability of *Saints* to make Church history accessible and relatable to the rising generation of Latter-day Saints. But I also hope that the volumes will help all church members better understand and appreciate who we are and where we come from. I want Saints today to see themselves in the history, to find their place in it. I hope that they will identify with and come to love the faithful people they read about in volume 1—and every subsequent volume. This is and has always been the Lord's work. The road has not always been smooth, but it is a road we are all traveling together as a Church. We are all part of the same narrative, although our roles in it differ. My hope is that readers will find their place in the story and embrace the sacred history of the Restoration. *Saints* is not perfect—and it is certainly not a complete or definitive history of the Church. But I hope it helps readers grow closer to their Savior and his gospel—and appreciate the ordinary women and men who have sacrificed and consecrated their lives to establish the Church of Jesus Christ in the latter days.

**Harper:** The Book of Mormon talks about enlarging our memory. *Saints* is designed to do a few things along those lines. One is to enlarge our memory in sacramental ways. We don't really care if readers learn all the dates of Church history, but we do care very much if readers are able to see God's love for them and for people of all times and places because of the way he has intervened in history to bless his children. I'll give you an example. The book begins with a devastating volcanic eruption in Indonesia. The day it happens, it kills thousands, and over the next few years it devastates and displaces millions of people in the Northern Hemisphere. We have sometimes said that this is the way God moved Joseph Smith from Vermont to New York. Joseph Smith didn't say that. The scriptures don't say that. Rather, in the first section of the Doctrine and Covenants the Lord says, "I the Lord, knowing the calamity which should come upon the inhabitants of the earth, called upon my servant Joseph Smith, Jun., . . . that mine everlasting covenant might be established" (D&C 1:17, 22). The reason the book begins with the problem of suffering and death and disrupted relationships is because all great stories begin with a problem and the bigger the problem that has to be overcome, the better the story. This is the biggest problem ever. The resolution to the problem is the restoration of the covenants and ordinances that enable all of God's children everywhere to conquer the problem of death—of their separation, in other words—from their Heavenly Parents and the separation that death creates between loved ones. God does not create us in his image and lead us into exaltation by preventing all suffering. It turns out that God, knowing the calamities that will come in our lives, gave us covenants so that we can overcome the devastating effects of those calamities.

Jesus Christ didn't come to prevent all suffering, he who was most innocent suffered more than we can imagine. And as a result of that, he restores us. He restores our relationship to our Heavenly Parents. He restores our relationships to each other so that the same sociality that exists among us here can exist there, except coupled with eternal glory.

The glorious good news in other words is that God revealed himself in the latter days. His nature, his character, and his plan were not well known when Mount Tambora exploded. He reintroduced himself to the world through Joseph Smith and the revelations. Now we know that God loves all his children. He has a plan for their redemption that makes life in a calamitous celestial world meaningful and redemptive and ultimately exalting.

**Griffiths:** *OK. Well, thank you both very much for your time, and we'll look forward to reading *Saints* as it is published!* **RE**