

BYU RELIGIOUS EDUCATION WINTER 2025

REVIEW

CALENDAR ✕ COMMENTS ✕ INTERVIEWS & SPOTLIGHTS ✕ STUDENT & TEACHER UPDATES ✕ BOOKS



Celebrating
Fifty Years of
the Religious
Studies Center

BYU Sesquicentennial Celebrations



THE YEAR 2025 IS AN EXCITING TIME FOR BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY. Starting in the fall semester, we will be celebrating BYU's sesquicentennial, marking 150 years since the university was established in 1875. The university is busy making final preparations for the big celebration, which will center on the gifts of light we each have and share with each other. The theme is "That light groweth brighter and brighter"—"that all may be edified of all" (Doctrine and Covenants 50:24; 88:122).

Since BYU's beginnings in 1875, religion classes have always been central to the BYU mission. The deed of trust for Brigham Young Academy stated that "the Old and New Testaments, the Book of Mormon and the Book of Doctrine and Covenants shall be read and their doctrines inculcated in the Academy."¹ The early religion classes were taught by faculty from across campus, and it wasn't until 1930 that the first full-time religion teacher at BYU was hired, Guy C. Wilson.

In Religious Education we are also preparing for our part in the university sesquicentennial celebration. We are calling it "Religious Education by the Numbers." Since we have responsibility for all BYU students, we're researching questions such as: How many students have participated in our classes? How many journal articles, books, and book chapters have our faculty published? How many viewers have watched our scripture roundtable discussions or listened to our *Y Religion* podcast episodes? How many students have we taken on travel study programs to Nauvoo, Jerusalem, or other destinations?

We'd love to hear from you about how you have been blessed by the work of Religious Education. Did you take a class from one of the first full-time religion faculty: Guy C. Wilson, Sidney B. Sperry, Russell R. Swensen, Wesley P. Lloyd, or J. Wyley Sessions? Or take a class from Dean Jeffrey R. Holland? Did you go on the first study abroad to Jerusalem in 1968, or were you in the first group at the Joseph Smith Academy in Nauvoo in 2000? Did you participate in our first Student Symposium in 1999? Were you part of the first master's degree cohort in chaplaincy in 2008?

If you would like to contribute to our celebration by sharing any of these experiences or an uplifting story about how Religious Education has blessed your life, please let us know by sending an email to religion150@byu.edu.

We look forward to celebrating all that has occurred in Religious Education in its first 150 years and embracing our bright future ahead.

Gaye Strathearn

Associate Dean, BYU Religious Education

Religious Education

Note

1. Quoted by Richard O. Cowan, *Teaching the Word: Religious Education at Brigham Young University* (Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2008), 2.

REVIEW

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HISTORIAN'S CORNER

Bringing All Nations, Kindreds, and Tongues to the Birthplace of the Church

By Scott C. Esplin



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A Story of Success: Celebrating Fifty Years of BYU's Religious Studies Center

By Brent R. Nordgren and R. Devan Jensen



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On the cover: BYU president Jeffrey R. Holland, who founded the Religious Studies Center as a dean and continued to offer direction.

<p>RELIGIOUS STUDIES CENTER Founded in 1975 by Jeffrey R. Holland Director Scott C. Esplin Associate Director Gaye Strathearn</p>	<p>Publications Director Jared W. Ludlow Associate Publications Director Michael A. Goodman</p>	<p>REVIEW MAGAZINE Editor Jared W. Ludlow Managing Editor Brent R. Nordgren</p>	<p>Editors Don L. Brugger Becky Isom Call R. Devan Jensen Publications Coordinator Leigh Ann Copas</p>	<p>Photographers Brent R. Nordgren Richard B. Crookston Student Editors Emma Clark Elise Green</p>	<p>DESIGN & PRODUCTION Hales Creative, LLC Design Director Kelly Nield</p>
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FIFTY YEARS OF THE RSC

JARED W. LUDLOW (jared_ludlow@byu.edu) IS THE PUBLICATIONS DIRECTOR OF THE BYU RELIGIOUS STUDIES CENTER.

THIS YEAR THE BYU RELIGIOUS Studies Center will celebrate its fiftieth anniversary, a remarkable feat of longevity for an auxiliary academic unit. While it has transformed through different iterations over the years, the RSC has maintained its effort to bring high-quality scholarship to aid gospel study. Recently the RSC underwent one of its biggest changes by moving from its origins under the caring leadership of Religious Education, after its founding by Religious Education Dean Jeffrey R. Holland, to being part of the broader religious publications at BYU alongside BYU Studies and the Neal A. Maxwell Institute. This move hasn't changed many things in the day-to-day work of the RSC staff,

but it has brought us closer to these sister institutions who also research and publish significant projects in matters related to the teachings and history of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

The RSC aims to assist members of the Church to better understand the context and background of the scriptures, which are of primary focus. Through its journal, the *Religious Educator*, the dozen or so books it copublishes with Deseret Book each year, and its incredible website (rsc.byu.edu), the RSC provides a venue for various scholars—both independent researchers and those from Seminary and Institutes, BYU campuses, and elsewhere—to publish their insights to a wide audience.



Jared W. Ludlow

Recently the RSC underwent one of its biggest changes by moving from its origins under the caring leadership of Religious Education, after its founding by Religious Education Dean Jeffrey R. Holland, to being part of the broader religious publications at BYU alongside BYU Studies and the Neal A. Maxwell Institute.

We appreciate all the administration, donors, scholars, staff, student interns, and readers over the years who have played an integral part in producing and sharing these resources. We look forward to continuing to be a trusted place where interested learners can go for further insight and understanding.

This issue of the *Review Magazine* will recount some of the fifty-year history of the RSC and

its close connections to Religious Education through the words of two long-standing employees here: Brent Nordgren and Devan Jensen. Scott Esplin discusses the birth of the Church amidst the birth of the country. Jan Martin highlights the prophetic emphases that are an important part of Religious Education pedagogy. Jared Halverson shares some of his effort to reach out and help those who may be experiencing challenges to their faith. Leigh Ann Copas shares details about the *Y Religion* podcasts and the expertise and various topics that are shared there. We also have highlights on some of our recent books that accompany the new *Come, Follow Me* year focusing on the Doctrine and Covenants and Church history.

We hope you continue to find insights and answers to your questions through the works of the BYU Religious Studies Center.



Jared W. Ludlow
Publications Director
BYU Religious Studies Center

Free Events

BYU Religious Education Student Symposium and Visualizing Learning Art Competition

Friday, March 14, 2025

Students will present their papers on Friday, March 14, at the Wilkinson Center in three sessions, beginning at 9:00 a.m. and ending at noon. Papers will focus on religious topics, providing students an opportunity to use the research and writing skills they have developed in Religious Education classes.



BYU Easter Conference

Friday, April 11, 2025

The BYU Easter Conference will be held in the Joseph Smith Building auditorium on April 11 beginning at 7:00 p.m. Each speaker will talk about various aspects of the Savior: his life, his mission, his Atonement, and his influence in our lives today. For more information, visit rsc.byu.edu/conferences/easter.



Church History Library Conference

Friday–Saturday, September 5–6, 2025

The Church History Library will host a symposium titled “I Am in Your Midst: Jesus Christ at the Center of Church History” at the Conference Center Theater in Salt Lake City. The two-day event will examine ways and methods that teachers and students can see the Savior more fully in the history of the Restoration.

These events are free of charge, and registration is not required. Some event details are subject to change. For more details, please visit us online at rsc.byu.edu/conferences or contact Devan Jensen at 801-422-9304.

Faculty Highlight: Frank F. Judd Jr.

FRANK F. JUDD JR. (frank_judd@byu.edu) IS A PROFESSOR OF ANCIENT SCRIPTURE AT BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY.



FRANK F. JUDD JR. WAS HIRED IN 1999 AS A FULL-TIME FACULTY MEMBER at BYU in the Department of Ancient Scripture, where he teaches classes on the Bible and the Book of Mormon. He has a BA and MA in Near Eastern studies from BYU, as well as an MA and PhD in New Testament studies from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Professor Judd is particularly interested in Latter-day Saint interpretation of scripture and the historical geography and archaeology of the Bible. He has spent several years of his career as a teacher and administrator at the BYU Jerusalem Center for Near Eastern Studies, where he has experienced many adventures. He and his wife, Jill, are the parents of five daughters, and they enjoy spending time together as a family. ✂

Staff Highlight: Marcia Davis

MARCIA DAVIS (marcia.davis@byu.edu) IS AN OFFICE ASSISTANT IN THE DEANS' OFFICE IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION AT BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY.



MARCIA DAVIS WAS BORN IN CALIFORNIA AND RAISED IN UTAH VALLEY. Being the eighth of nine children, she felt that home and family were always a big influence in her life. One of Marcia's favorite college experiences at BYU was participating in the study abroad program in Jerusalem. Marcia also served as a missionary in the Chile Osorno Mission. She met her husband, Bill, while at BYU, and they now have eight children and eight grandchildren, with one on the way. The Davis family has lived in Lindon for more than thirty years. Marcia enjoys biking, jogging, quilting, reading, music, cooking, gardening, going out to dinner, and playing with her grandkids. She currently serves as a missionary in the Tabernacle Choir at Temple Square. Marcia enjoys working in the deans' office among such amazing people. ✂

Faculty Highlight: Byran B. Korth

BYRAN B. KORTH (byran_korth@byu.edu) IS AN ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF CHURCH HISTORY AND DOCTRINE AT BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY.



BYRAN B. KORTH IS CURRENTLY SERVING AS THE ASSOCIATE CHAIR IN THE Department of Church History and Doctrine at BYU. He received his bachelor's and master's degrees from BYU in family sciences (1993 and 1995, respectively), and a doctorate in human development and family studies from Auburn University. He currently teaches the Eternal Family course, where he has merged his training and experience in early childhood development and family relations with the gospel of Jesus Christ and the truths of the family proclamation. His scholarly work includes research on the coming forth of the family proclamation and the spiritual development of young children. He and his wife, Sheia, live in Springville, Utah, and are the parents of three young adult children. ✂

Faculty Highlight: Kenneth L. Alford

KENNETH L. ALFORD (ken_alford@byu.edu) IS A PROFESSOR OF CHURCH HISTORY AND DOCTRINE AT BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY.



KENNETH L. ALFORD WAS THRILLED TO JOIN THE FACULTY OF RELIGIOUS Education in 2008. He loves BYU. Before returning to Provo (where he was born), he served on active duty in the U.S. Army for twenty-nine and a half years, retiring as a colonel, with assignments as an associate professor of computer science at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, New York, a department chair and professor of strategic leadership and organizational behavior at the National Defense University in Washington, DC, and at the Pentagon. He earned a BA in political science from BYU, an MA in international relations from the University of Southern California, an MS in computer science from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, and a PhD in computer science from George Mason University. He has earned the rank of full professor twice—but neither time in his PhD discipline. He has published and presented on a wide variety of subjects. Ken and his sweet late wife, Sherilee, have four wonderful children and twenty amazing grandchildren. ✂

Bringing All Nations, Kindreds, and Tongues to the Birthplace of the Church

By Scott C. Esplin

SCOTT C. ESPLIN (scott_esplin@byu.edu) IS DEAN OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION AT BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY.

“**G**OD HAD A WORK FOR ME TO DO,” the angel Moroni told Joseph Smith during his first appearance to the young prophet in his upstairs bedroom in Palmyra, New York, on the evening of September 21, 1823. “My name should be had for good and evil,” the Prophet recalled, “among all nations, kindreds, and tongues” (Joseph Smith—History 1:33).

In the spring of 2024, Religious Education witnessed, in part, a fulfillment of that prophecy when we took a group of nineteen students from many “nations, kindreds, and tongues” around the globe to study the restoration of the gospel at sites associated with the birth of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Religious Education partnered with BYU’s Office of Belonging and International Student Services to host a two-week field study focused on religious and civil freedom. Informally called the “birth of the Church, birth of the country” travel study, the experience included students from around the world for whom visiting the earliest

sites of the Restoration might never be possible.

BYU students from China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Vietnam, and Korea joined others from Chile, Venezuela, Mexico, and the United States to explore, on-site, the foundational events of the Restoration. In Sharon, Vermont, students walked the grounds of the cradle of the

same sacred text was first printed.

In Harmony, Pennsylvania, students studied revelations that are central to the beginning of the Church, including the restoration of priesthood authority, charges regarding missionary work, and instructions about the translation of the Book of Mormon. In Fayette, New York, they learned about how the Church was

BYU students from China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Vietnam, and Korea joined others from Chile, Venezuela, Mexico, and the United States to explore, on-site, the foundational events of the Restoration.

Restoration, the birthplace of the Prophet Joseph Smith. In Palmyra and Manchester, New York, they explored the Smith family farm, scene of the appearance of the Father and the Son in the First Vision as well as Moroni’s visits; climbed the Hill Cumorah, where the Book of Mormon was discovered; and toured the Grandin print shop, where that

organized, reflecting on its growth from six founding members in a small frontier cabin to an organization that spans oceans and continents, reaching their homes far away. The students even calculated how many tens of thousands of miles, in total, they had traveled from those homes to be where the Church began.





Students visited sites in Harmony, Pennsylvania, and Fayette, New York.
Photos courtesy of Scott C. Esplin and Shana Clemence.

In many cases these students are among the first members of the Church in their families and, in some cases, among the first members in their countries.

In multiple locations, students live streamed for loved ones back home the experience they were having in the Smith or Whitmer homes, the print shop, or a grove of trees made sacred by the visit of the Father and the Son. Translating their experiences into Spanish, Portuguese, Chinese, Korean, and Vietnamese, these remarkable students embraced the BYU slogan “The world is our campus” by literally spreading their remote campus experience around the world.

At the conclusion of the experience, one student reflected, “Each stop unveiled significant events leading to the restoration of the true Church of Christ. These historical chains of events began to click into place, revealing their direct connection to me and the miracles that have shaped my life. Now I understand, there is power in learning about Church history. They helped me see the pattern of the Lord’s works and how he orchestrated his heavenly plan and how that plan affects my life.” Another poetically added, “Faith can move mountains, faith can open heavens, for a young man in New York. Faith reached out through missionary work, found me and my family, in a small town in Mexico, when we needed to find the Lord.”

In many cases these students are among the first members of the Church in their families and, in some cases, among the first members in their countries. Like the early Saints whose lives we studied, these students too are pioneers. One



Students in front of the E. B. Grandin print shop (above), inside the print shop examining printer proof sheets (right), and outside the Joseph and Lucy Smith log home (below) in Palmyra, New York.



student concluded, “We talked a lot about being pioneers on the trip. One day I will share this story with my

children, with hopes that they share it, to see how God always finds a way to restore his love and truth to

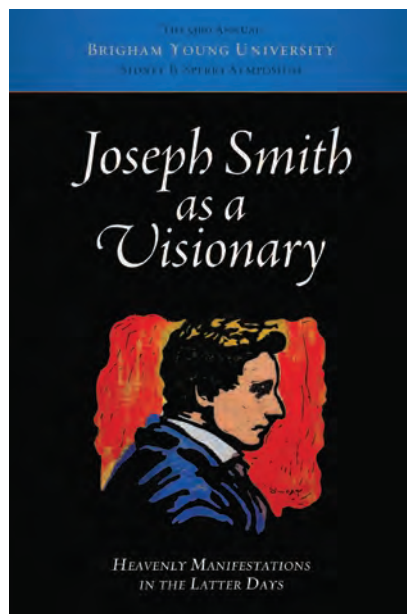
his children. . . . One day when my children and great-grandchildren are seeking to learn the truth, I hope they can take my story to recognize how God’s purpose is to bring us back to His presence.”

More than two hundred years ago, Moroni told a seventeen-year-old boy that his name and his story would be known around the world. For two weeks last spring, students from around the world came together to celebrate that story in the places where it began. ✂

Joseph Smith as a Visionary

By Emma Clark

EMMA CLARK IS A STUDENT EDITOR AT THE RELIGIOUS STUDIES CENTER.



WHEN JOSEPH SMITH RECEIVED the First Vision, reports of spiritual encounters were already familiar amid the religious fervor of the Second Great Awakening. Joseph was a true visionary, but swelling religious excitement drove many to dismiss him as just another self-proclaimed prophet. Those who believe Joseph to be a prophet have always seen his experiences as legitimate communication with heaven.

As a testimony to the truth of Joseph Smith's prophetic calling, this year's BYU Religious Education Symposium in Honor of Sidney B. Sperry embraced the theme "Joseph Smith as a Visionary: Heavenly Manifestations in the Latter Days." Scholars and Church leaders

presented insights into the context and significance of Joseph's visionary experiences.

Joseph received his visions by faith, and we likewise interpret them through that lens. As we examine their content, we see patterns of truth, consistencies with the Bible, and enduring doctrinal applications.

The spirit and testimony felt within this symposium can be perpetuated in individual study. Learning from Joseph's visionary experiences is facilitated by scholarly tools and analysis more readily available than ever before. Elder LeGrand R. Curtis Jr., a General Authority Seventy, highlighted the learning opportunities available to us through the publication of *The Joseph Smith Papers*, saying, "[They] are a remarkable tool for studying these revelatory events that were so fundamental to Joseph's calling as the first prophet, seer and revelator of this dispensation."¹

Individual learning is a key facet of fortifying our testimonies. The research shared in this symposium and published in its accompanying print volume proves by its diversity the vast opportunities for new insights and lifelong learning about Joseph Smith and his role as a visionary.

In the spring of 1820 the heavens were opened and heavenly

messengers once again made the will of the Father known on earth. Joseph Smith, the Prophet of the Restoration, received a vision heralding an age of revelation, divine guidance, doctrinal direction, and timeless truth. Joseph found himself under the mantle of facilitating the restoration of the Lord's church. Like rain in a desert, knowledge from heaven fell upon Joseph in visions, directing him to truths about the nature of God, the organization of his church, and the purity of his doctrine.

Being a visionary was not novel to the people of Joseph's time. Spiritual revival had led to claims of divine encounters and subsequent religious movements that sprouted up after the charismatic leaders claiming such experiences. As a result of such an excited environment, Joseph's visions were, to those who failed to understand their value, whispers in a windstorm.

The welcome reception of visions had gone stale, and the rising popularity of intellectualism eventually led to negative associations with the word *visionary*. Visions were seen as not only unfounded but decidedly untrue. Skepticism and contempt created barriers to Joseph as he endeavored to share what he had experienced. Jared M. Halverson, an associate professor of ancient scripture at BYU, explained, "Even

in an age of religious revivalism, by ‘continu[ing] to affirm that [he] had seen a vision’ (Joseph Smith—History 1:27), Joseph Smith was making a courageous, countercultural claim.”²

Joseph continued to share the news of his visions, actively seeking to publish them in newspapers. Scholar Jeremy J. Chatelain illustrated in his paper the cycle of disappointments Joseph had in his attempts to share the revelation he had received. Antagonism toward Joseph and the ever-prevalent caricature used in news to create a good story drove reporters to twist Joseph’s visions into tall tales and eliminate the important doctrine central to the visions.³

In stark contrast to shallow newspaper “retellings” of Joseph’s day, each paper presented at the symposium dives into the deep well of meaningful truths expounded in Joseph’s visions. Looking at our time, Sister Rebecca L. Craven, who served in the Young Women General Presidency from 2018 to 2023, described the doctrinal impact of Joseph’s visions, turning the focus to why they have been necessary and what fruits they bear. Through Joseph’s visionary experiences, she noted, we understand and enjoy the sealing power, we learn about the marvelous work of the Lord, we receive his commandments, and we have the opportunity to cherish the Book of Mormon and the protection it offers.⁴



First Vision, by Walter Rane.

Affirming the purpose of the 2025 symposium, the accompanying print volume includes this line in its introduction: “It is our sincere hope that the content of this book will stand as a testament to the mantle of the Prophet Joseph Smith as a visionary (in the most literal sense of the word), but also to the truth that the heavens are indeed open in these latter days; that God, through his infinite grace, continues to speak, visions occur, and the ongoing restoration of light and truth is poured out for all who are willing to believe and receive.”⁵ ✂

Notes

1. LeGrand R. Curtis Jr., “The Joseph Smith Papers Project’s Elucidation of the Visionary and Visitation Experiences of Joseph Smith,” in *Joseph Smith as a Visionary: Heavenly Manifestations in the Latter Days*, ed. Alonzo L. Gaskill, Stephan D. Taeger, Derek R. Sainsbury, and Roger G. Christensen (Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University; Deseret Book, 2025), 14.
2. Jared M. Halverson, “Covering the Seers’: Antivisionary Skepticism in the Days of Joseph Smith,” in *Joseph Smith as a Visionary*, 32.
3. Jeremy J. Chatelain, “The Reporting of Joseph Smith’s First Visitations in Nineteenth-Century Newspapers,” in *Joseph Smith as a Visionary*, 87–106.
4. Rebecca L. Craven, “Let the Hearts of All My People Rejoice,” in *Joseph Smith as a Visionary*, 17–30.
5. “Introduction,” in *Joseph Smith as a Visionary*, viii–ix.

A Story of Success



Celebrating Fifty Years of BYU's Religious Studies Center

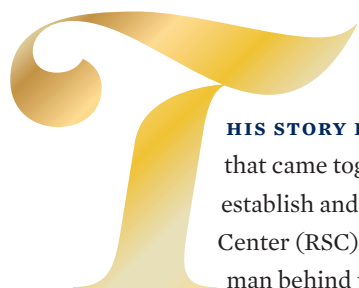
By Brent R. Nordgren
and R. Devan Jensen



▲ Religious Studies Center and Religious Education team, 2021. Courtesy of BYU Photo.

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R. DEVAN JENSEN (*devan_jensen@byu.edu*) IS THE EXECUTIVE EDITOR AT THE RELIGIOUS STUDIES CENTER.



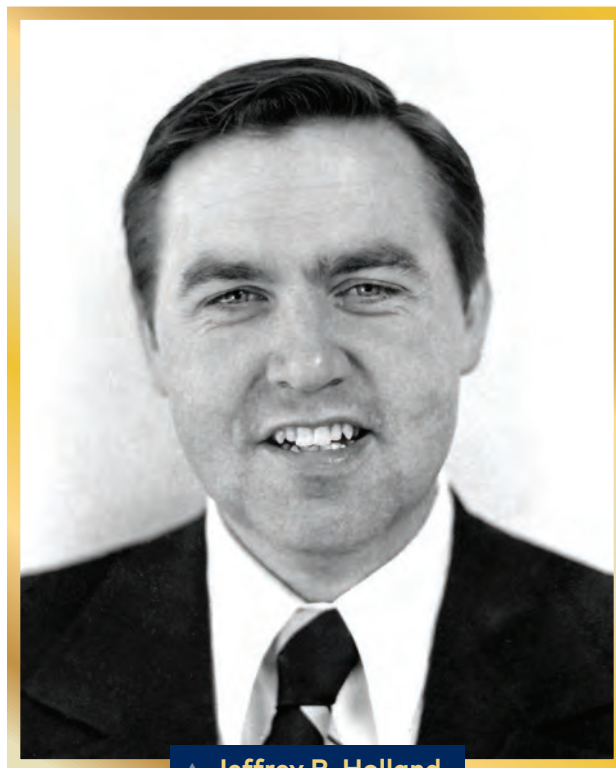
HIS STORY FOCUSES ON TWO DYNAMICS that came together in an unexpected way to establish and shape the Religious Studies Center (RSC) at BYU: first, the extraordinary man behind the inspiration that led to the organization of the RSC; and second, Jeffrey R. Holland's continuing fifty-year encouragement and guidance he provided to perpetuate his vision of the RSC and its success, despite his considerable involvement in other extensive endeavors that he deservedly become well known for throughout the world.

An Inspired Beginning

In 1974, thirty-three-year-old Jeffrey R. Holland was appointed to be dean of what is now known as Religious Education (Religious Instruction), making him the youngest dean on BYU campus, a real challenge for someone who had never even been a full-time faculty member at a university. His youthful vision and enthusiasm endeared him to faculty and students alike.¹

Appointing such a young dean was likely a combination of inspiration and the fact that young Holland had accomplished more than most at such a young age. Some of his notable successes began in high school as a student leader and a varsity athlete at Dixie High School and Dixie College in his native St. George, Utah. Holland received his bachelor's and master's degrees in English and religious education, respectively, from Brigham Young University. He obtained a second master's degree and a PhD in American studies from Yale University.²

Not only were his educational achievements impressive, by his thirty-third birthday Holland had served as an institute of religion teacher in Hayward, California, an institute director in Seattle, Washington, a counselor in two stake presidencies, and a bishop.³



▲ Jeffrey R. Holland

Laying the Foundation

President Holland recalled his thoughts just after he was appointed dean of Religious Instruction, "When I came to the dean's post, I was rather immediately concerned that there was not a recognized center or identifiable focal point around which the faculty of religious education could pool their scholarship and be able to publish distinctly LDS research and writing."⁴

He added,

I simply realized we have a lot of important things to say by very able people—men and women. But we did not have a lot of opportunities to publish LDS-oriented scholarship.

We had the Church magazines, but often the chance to publish there was by invitation and on assigned topics. It wouldn't necessarily have been

somebody's area of interest or research. So we had very limited ways to let out what I thought was an increasingly wonderful and professional profound faculty right, and teach through the printed word and through the publication and get beyond the classroom—go beyond the university.⁵

Creating a research and publishing center would expand that outreach. “We needed a place—a center, if you wish—for our faculty to write and share their teaching with an ever-widening audience of students, alumni, and Latter-day Saints generally.”⁶

He explained, “So we combined those two elements: an organizational principle, a home for several existing entities, and a place to write and publish good, orthodox studies that would matter to us in Religious Education at BYU. I took that idea to then-President Dallin H. Oaks. He embraced it instantly, and the next thing I knew, it was to the board of trustees, and we had a Religious Studies Center.”⁷

Elder Holland added, “In the early going, as the RSC got started, we picked up whatever was available here and there, publishing a wide variety, sometimes even a kind of peculiar variety of things. Today I think interest coupled with demand is refining that, and we will not have either the luxury of or need for publishing peripheral things. First-rate books, profound religious and scholarly essays and insights—that is what's going to define the center in the years ahead.”⁸

In April of 1976, Dean Holland was called to serve as the eleventh Commissioner of the Church Educational System, replacing Neal A. Maxwell. With Holland's departure, it was determined that Dean Ellis Rasmussen should become the director of the RSC.⁹

This new organization became a place where quality research on religious topics could be published and made available to an anxious—perhaps even hungry—Latter-day Saint audience. In 1977, as Church Commissioner, Holland told the center that he hoped it would bring dialogue with other cultures and religions, leading to greater understanding, brotherhood, and peace.¹⁰

This new organization became a place where quality research on religious topics could be published and made available to an anxious—perhaps even hungry—Latter-day Saint audience.

Elder Holland remembers, “We made our launch by publishing *Nibley on the Timely and Timeless* [1978] and held the first of what would become an annual symposium. Since that modest beginning, so many significant publications have been sponsored, encouraged, facilitated, and published by the Religious Studies Center. I am genuinely impressed.”¹¹ That idea launched an influential annual event and book series.

Expanding the Vision

While serving as president of BYU, President Holland proposed that the RSC hold an annual Book of Mormon Symposium.¹² That idea launched an influential annual event and book series.

In a 2015 interview, then-Elder Holland remarked, “No question that our initial view was too modest, too narrow. I see us writing to a wider world more and more in the years ahead as we come out of obscurity and out of darkness.” He went on to say, “We should do a world-class job. I would like this to become known as the scholarly voice of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints on matters that would normally be considered as ‘religious studies.’ When people think, ‘Where do I look to see the real heartbeat of intellectual life and academic contribution for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints?’ I want them to think BYU, and at BYU, when the issue is religious scholarship, I want them to think of the Religious Studies Center.”¹³

Holland went on to explain how we are “in an era—and will continue to be so from here on in—in which we need the very best contributions and examples from every Latter-day Saint on the team in order to declare the



▲ Elder Holland at the RSC 40th anniversary event.

truthfulness of the gospel and see it prevail in a darkened world.”¹⁴

In his speech given at the fortieth anniversary celebration, Holland said, “We’ve always been at war with the adversary to win the hearts of men and women. But now, more and more, we must be vigilant in the battle for the minds of the human family. Fortunately, what you do at the RSC is focused on both the mind and the heart, which is the divine formula.”¹⁵

When Robert Millet became the new dean of Religious Education and the director of the RSC in 1991, he stated, “The Religious Studies Center has been established to speak to different audiences, to focus our research and direct our publications toward various groups of people. Secondly, the RSC has a broader responsibility: there is a need for ‘gospel scholarship,’ for research and writing, which lifts the level of understanding and strengthens the commitment of the average member of the Church.” This new vision by Millet inspired him to start a journal in the year 2000, titled *The Religious Educator: Perspectives on the Restored Gospel*.¹⁶

Developing the Essential Tools

Several important developments at the RSC over the past fifty years include the following:

- **Full- and part-time staff.** Since the early days of the RSC, the staff has grown from having only a faculty publications director, with limited resources for identifying and supporting new research, to now having full-time staff, including a publications coordinator, editors, and a production supervisor, as well as part-time editorial and design teams.
- **Books.** Even though the RSC didn’t publish its first book until 1978, by the end of 2024, it had published nearly 400 books.
- **Student employees.** Through the years, the RSC has hired many student employees who helped facilitate and realize the vision of the Religious Studies Center. When Elder Holland learned of the positive impact of students, he said,

I am thrilled to see student efforts, student essays, and student products. I would not have been conscious enough at the time to see that would be one of the great things that the RSC would grow into. I am happy that it has. Again, I think that testifies to the vitality of a good idea. If something is good, suddenly it starts to bless more here and bless more there. If you plant a little seed and it grows up into a pretty healthy tree, I guess a lot of people can get under it and enjoy the shade in three or four or five directions.¹⁷

- **Religious Educator.** As noted, the RSC began publishing the *Religious Educator*, an academic journal with a focus on the restored gospel of Jesus Christ, Latter-day Saint scriptures, and Latter-day Saint history. It was first intended to provide gospel teachers with carefully prepared, inspirational, and informative articles that would help assist them in their teaching roles. It has evolved to benefit a much

broader range of Latter-day Saints who love the gospel and its teachings.¹⁸ By the end of 2024, there have been seventy-two peer-reviewed *Religious Educator* issues published.

- **Website.** In 2008, as the RSC prepared to launch their new website, they also “embarked on a project to put the complete RSC library on its website.” By making nearly all the RSC publication library available online at no charge, the original research efforts of the faculty are given a second life.¹⁹ The RSC website has extended its reach beyond anything that was first imagined. For the year 2024, the website had over 1.85 million active users and 3.6 million page views and was accessed by users from over 212 countries.
- **Review magazine.** Also in 2008 Richard Holzapfel, the publications director, proposed changing the format of the *RSC Newsletter* to a full-color magazine to be called the *BYU Religious Education Review*. This magazine built upon and expanded the earlier efforts to provide information about the RSC’s activities—including highlighting current research initiatives. The *Review* is similar to the *RSC Newsletter* but gives greater voice to Religious Education, including the Departments of Ancient Scripture and Church History and Doctrine, highlighting students, faculty, staff, and administration. When the magazine was launched, it was made available to all full-time BYU faculty at no charge. The number of new subscribers grew rapidly and steadily.²⁰ By the end of 2024, thirty-four issues of the *Review* magazine had been published with well over 11,000 subscribers.
- **Deseret Book.** Starting in 2009, the RSC and Deseret Book established a copublishing arrangement that would help RSC books reach a much broader audience and help fill an academic niche for Deseret Book in Latter-day Saint scholarship.²¹
- **Articles or chapters.** The RSC has published over 7,300 articles or chapters, most of which are available for free on the RSC website. These articles are excellent resources for those who want to study a gospel topic or prepare for a lesson.

- **Authors.** The work of the RSC would not be possible without our authors, who provide the important, relevant, and excellent content that allows the RSC to make such a contribution. As of today, over 1,275 authors have contributed their talent and expertise to produce those 7,300 articles.
- **Symposia and conferences.** The RSC has also held a wide variety of symposia and conferences over the years (some held annually, with hundreds of attendees). Audiences come to learn from a host of religion scholars, historians, Church leaders, and educators without charge.
- **Social media.** To extend the reach to additional demographics, including the rising generation, the RSC added a student employee position for media specialists. A digital newsletter was developed, reaching over 4,400 subscribers weekly, along with a regular podcast that attracts hundreds of viewers—both aimed at facilitating gospel study among our followers.



▲ RSC student intern stations and publications library.

Conclusion

In an interview in 2015, Elder Holland commented that he didn't anticipate how the RSC would develop, but he was grateful "it has taken on the maturity and the dimension that it now has." He said,

It is very gratifying that it's forty years old, which is really quite amazing when you think of that. And often, I think the Lord does things with us and through us that we are not aware of at the time. The scripture says, "Be not weary in well-doing, for ye are laying the foundation of a great work. And out of small things proceedeth that which is great" (Doctrine and Covenants 64:33). I think it was a small thing—in a way, almost an incidental thing when we started—but out of small things proceedeth that which is great.²²

The original vision of the RSC started with then-Dean Holland, who served as an instrument for Religious Education to create additional opportunities for research and publishing at the university level. This single idea with its multiple facets has grown beyond what was originally conceived. More recently, the RSC was combined with the Maxwell Institute and BYU Studies to create Brigham Young University Religious Publications.

Because of the seeds planted fifty years ago by President Holland, and the many people who have contributed their time and talent over the years, the RSC has flourished and touched the lives of millions of people.

Reflecting on his time at the RSC, Richard Holzapfel said,

One day I was sitting in my office in the Heber Grant Building and thought, 'I don't know who was here twenty or thirty years ago.' It was a defining moment for me, realizing that in another twenty or thirty years into the future somebody else will be sitting here and will not remember that I served here as the publication director of the RSC. It became clear that the RSC must not be personality

driven so that our contributions will live beyond the individual contributor. Every person involved in the Religious Studies Center—whether a contributing author, donor, symposium attendee, or publications director—has been building the Religious Studies Center piece by piece. The new RSC leaders will stand on our shoulders and see things we did not see, and they will make changes and adjustments, and that is exactly the plan. We need to adapt and change to meet the needs of an ever-growing international Church.²³

After serving as a young dean in the 1970s, Jeffrey R. Holland went on to serve in many other important capacities. At thirty-five, he was called to become the Commissioner of the Church Educational System. Before his fortieth birthday, he was called to be president of Brigham Young University. In 1989 he was called as a member of the First Quorum of Seventy. At fifty-three he was called to be an Apostle. In November 2023 he became the Acting President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. It is a truly remarkable story of the ripple effect that occurred during a brief time, in late 1975, when one man with an inspired vision planted a seed that became the catalyst for this story of success.²⁴



▲ The RSC offices are housed in the historic Heber J. Grant Building, the old BYU library. Photo by Brent R. Nordgren.

“This Church has a divine destiny. It also has an immense amount of work to do and considerable opposition to doing it.”

—PRESIDENT JEFFREY R. HOLLAND

The Future of the RSC

While serving as president of BYU, President Holland said,

With the horizons expanding at an unprecedented rate for the study of what is ancient and what is modern, it is fitting for us to look to the resources, scholarship, and leadership of the [Religious Studies] Center to assist us in our search for “all that God has revealed, all that he does now reveal, and [all] that he will yet reveal . . . pertaining to the kingdom of God.” We build on a grand tradition and hope to add an increasing amount of substantial, published research to the good work already begun.²⁵

The RSC remains committed to pursuing President Holland’s original and ongoing vision of an ever-expanding horizon of gospel scholarship and sharing our resources with a global audience.

President Holland declared,

For university matters we combine the head and the heart, the spirit and the faith, reason and revelation. The Religious Studies Center and those products that are coming out of it represent that, symbolize that, offer that kind of gospel evidence to the world. I just want you to keep doing it and keep doing it better. I want every piece that comes out to be so stunning that people are speechless, that they are fighting their way to the website or to their mailbox to get their hands on the truly inspirational, profoundly important materials you pursue at the RSC. That is what I hope for today and tomorrow, next month and next year. We have a lot of work to do. This Church has a divine destiny. It also has

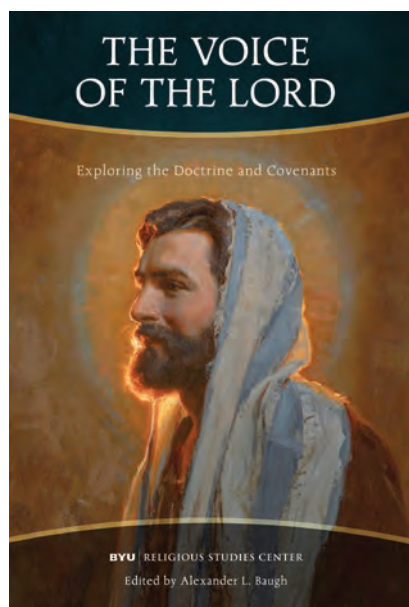
an immense amount of work to do and considerable opposition to doing it. We need the products of the Religious Studies Center, and we need all the good people who are contributing there.²⁶ ❧

Notes

1. Lawrence R. Flake, *Prophets and Apostles of the Last Dispensation* (Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2001), 555–58.
2. “Jeffrey R. Holland,” www.churchofjesuschrist.org/learn/jeffrey-r-holland.
3. Jeffrey R. Holland, “Within the Clasp of Your Arms,” general conference talk, April 1983, www.churchofjesuschrist.org; Gerry Avant, “Faith is New General Authority’s Gift,” *Church News*, April 29, 1989, 12.
4. Jeffrey R. Holland, “The Heart and a Willing Mind,” address given at the Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, May 14, 2015.
5. Transcript of the RSC fortieth anniversary proceedings, May 14, 2015.
6. Thomas A. Wayment, Devan Jensen, and Brent R. Nordgren, “Elder Holland Helps Celebrate RSC’s Fortieth, Looks to Future,” *BYU Religious Education Review*, Fall 2015, 14–19.
7. “The RSC Turns Forty: A Conversation with Elder Jeffrey R. Holland,” interview by Thomas A. Wayment, *Religious Educator* 16, no. 2 (2015).
8. Wayment et al., “Elder Holland Helps Celebrate.”
9. Truman Madsen, LaMar Berrett, and Spencer Palmer, “A Summary of Discussion,” May 11, 1976, in the Skyroom, Wilkinson Student Center, BYU.
10. Jeffrey R. Holland, “. . . Of Countries and of Kingdoms,” *BYU Studies* 18, no. 1 (1977).
11. Transcript of the RSC, May 14, 2015.
12. Paul R. Cheesman, preface to *The Book of Mormon: The Keystone Scripture* (Religious Studies Center, 1988), iv.
13. “RSC Turns Forty.”
14. Holland, “Heart and a Willing Mind.”
15. R. Scott Lloyd, “Religious Studies Center at BYU Looks Back and Ahead,” *Church News*, May 24, 2015.
16. “Religious Studies Center Welcomes New Director,” *Religious Studies Center Newsletter* 5, no. 3 (May 1991).
17. “RSC Turns Forty,” 5.
18. “Elder Holland Helps Celebrate.”
19. “Ten Years at the Religious Studies Center,” interview by Brent R. Nordgren, *BYU Religious Education Review*, Fall 2010.
20. “Elder Holland Helps Celebrate.”
21. “Elder Holland Helps Celebrate.”
22. “RSC Turns Forty,” 6–7.
23. “Ten Years at the Religious Studies Center.”
24. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jeffrey_R._Holland.
25. Brent R. Nordgren and R. Devan Jensen, “The RSC Turns Thirty-Five!,” *BYU Religious Education Review*, Winter 2010, 20.
26. “RSC Turns Forty.”

The Voice of the Lord: Exploring the Doctrine and Covenants

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HEARING THE VOICE OF THE LORD is a central theme in the Doctrine and Covenants. The phrase “voice of the Lord,” or a variation thereof, appears more than forty times, while the phrase “thus saith the Lord” occurs more than sixty times. However, hearing the voice of the Lord does not necessarily imply an audible voice. Rather, it suggests that those who study and ponder the revelations under the influence of the Holy Ghost will be able to understand and feel how his words apply to them personally. The Lord affirmed this

principle, saying, “These words are not of men nor of man, but of me; . . . for it is my voice which speaketh them unto you; for they are given by my Spirit unto you” (Doctrine and Covenants 18:34–35).

The significance of the revelations in the Doctrine and Covenants to Latter-day Saints is profound. Elder John A. Widtsoe once wrote, “Every doctrine taught by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is found, either outlined or shadowed forth, in the Book of Doctrine and Covenants. As far as I know, there is no doctrine taught by the Church which is not found in some way or form in this book.” He further emphasized that the Doctrine and Covenants is essential because “no other one of our sacred books can lay the same claim to a full survey of all the doctrines of the Church.”¹

In 2025 Church members will once again study the Doctrine and Covenants as part of the *Come, Follow Me* curriculum. In anticipation of this, I asked, “What has President Russell M. Nelson said about the significance and importance of the Doctrine and Covenants to Latter-day Saints?” Rather than answer that

myself, I turned to ChatGPT! Here’s what it provided:²

President Russell M. Nelson has highlighted the Doctrine and Covenants as a vital source of modern revelation, describing it as a unique compilation of teachings from Jesus Christ to his followers in the latter days. He has emphasized several key aspects of its importance:

Source of “pure Doctrine” and guidance for our time. In the October 2021 General Conference, President Nelson encouraged members to seek “pure truth, pure doctrine, and pure revelation.” He explained that the teachings in the Doctrine and Covenants offer these qualities by presenting the Savior’s words for individuals today. He emphasized that these revelations are a guide for personal and collective strength, especially during modern-day challenges.

Preparation for the Second Coming. President

Nelson has repeatedly stressed that the Doctrine and Covenants prepares members for the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. It instructs members on living as covenant followers, highlights the need for repentance, and provides direction on how to prepare spiritually and temporally for the Savior's return. He has noted that this preparation is vital in "the last days" and has encouraged members to study these revelations to understand the Lord's expectations for his covenant people.

Focus on temples and covenants. In recent years, President Nelson has highlighted teachings on temples and ordinances found in the Doctrine and Covenants, explaining how these instructions help deepen members' commitment to Christ and prepare them for the blessings of exaltation. In his address "The Temple and Your Spiritual Foundation," he noted that the Doctrine and Covenants provides direction on sacred temple practices and covenants essential to returning to God's presence, underscoring the book's role in the restored gospel.

Encouragement of personal revelation. President Nelson has

frequently taught that studying the Doctrine and Covenants encourages members to seek personal revelation, describing it as a "living document" that demonstrates how to receive divine guidance through the Holy Spirit. He reminds members that they can follow the examples of Joseph Smith and others in the Doctrine and Covenants to find answers and guidance in their own lives. President Nelson's teachings underscore the Doctrine and Covenants as more than a historical document; he describes it as a divine handbook for discipleship, a preparatory guide for the Second Coming, and an invitation to covenant with God in the modern era.

In keeping with President Nelson's numerous invitations to prayerfully read and study the doctrines, teachings, and principles in the Doctrine and Covenants, the recently published book *Hearing the Voice of the Lord: Exploring the Doctrine and Covenants* aims to provide readers with doctrinal clarifications, explanations, and insights, along with historical context, drawn from a selection of significant revelations in this sacred record. The intent is to assist individuals and families in their desire not only to hear the Savior's voice but also to follow him more fully.

Contributors explore topics such as Elijah's visitation in the

Kirtland Temple, the sacred location of Adam-ondi-Ahman, priesthood power of women, Satan's reality, the establishment of Zion, and plural marriage. Authors also examine the historical context of consecration, sacramental covenants, baptism for the dead, redemption of the dead, and the three degrees of heavenly glory. The articles combine to show that from the very beginning of the Restoration, our prophets' inspired words are "the will of the Lord, . . . the mind of the Lord, . . . the voice of the Lord, and the power of God unto salvation" (Doctrine and Covenants 68:4).

President Russell M. Nelson said, "As we seek to be disciples of Jesus Christ, our efforts to *hear Him* need to be ever more intentional. It takes conscious and consistent effort to fill our daily lives with His words, His teachings, His truths."³ With illuminating insights and useful historical context, this collection of essays is a valuable resource for those seeking to hear the voice of the Lord in their lives. ❧

Notes

1. John A. Widtsoe, *The Message of the Doctrine and Covenants*, ed. G. Homer Durham (Bookcraft, 1969), 117.
2. Response to "What has President Russell M. Nelson said about the significance and importance of the Doctrine and Covenants to Latter-day Saints?," ChatGPT-4o, Open AI, December 2024, edited for style and accuracy.
3. Russell M. Nelson, "Hear Him," general conference talk, April 2020, www.churchofjesuschrist.org.

PROPHETIC EMPHASES AND BYU RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

By Jan J. Martin

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IN 2023, DURING A SEMINARIES and Institutes of Religion annual broadcast, Elder Clark G. Gilbert, Commissioner of the Church Educational System, recommended that those who teach the gospel to young adults deliberately accentuate five themes taught by modern prophets. Elder Gilbert said that young adults should (1) know their divine identities as children of God, children of the covenant, and disciples of Jesus Christ; (2) be able to draw on the power of Jesus Christ and his covenants; (3) allow God to prevail in their lives; (4) be able to teach gospel truth to others with love; and (5) take charge of their own testimonies.² Eighteen months later at a Religious Education Conference held at BYU-Provo (June 2024), Elder Gilbert reiterated his desire that the prophetic emphases be taught to young adults and explained that all religious educators should become a prophetic echo of the instruction prophets are giving to the young adults of the church.



Elder Clark G. Gilbert speaks at the 2023 annual broadcast for Seminaries and Institutes of Religion. Courtesy of Intellectual Reserve, Inc.

In response to Elder Gilbert's instruction, Religious Education at BYU's Provo campus is making concerted efforts to incorporate the prophetic emphases into all course material and the ways faculty teach and minister to students. Faculty members are encouraged to identify the five prophetic themes as they teach from the scriptures. For

example, they may teach students the importance of remembering their divine identity by showing how many scriptural figures, including prophets, struggled with confidence, personal weakness, or other shortcomings, especially when called of God to do hard things. Examples include Moses (Exodus 3), Enoch (Moses 7:26–37), Gideon (Judges 6:11–17), Mary, the

mother of Jesus (Luke 1:26–38), Paul (2 Corinthians 12), Moroni (Ether 12:23–29), and Joseph Smith (Doctrine and Covenants 3, 10). These individuals were reminded of their divine identities as they accepted important responsibilities given to them by God, and their stories can help students identify and discuss the first prophetic emphasis about divine identities and the importance of continually remembering them. Similarly, many scriptural figures participated in divine covenants, demonstrating how to draw on the power of those covenants during times of prosperity, uncertainty, turmoil, fear, conflict, or adversity: Noah (Genesis 6–7), Abraham (Genesis 17; Moses 1), Moses (Genesis 19); Ruth (Ruth 1), Zacharias (Luke 1:67–79); Nephi (1 Nephi 17), Lehi (2 Nephi 1), and Alma the elder (Mosiah 24). These accounts provide examples for young adults to follow in drawing power from their own covenants. Because God works in eternal patterns (Doctrine and Covenants 52:14), faculty can readily identify and discuss the prophetic emphases as they teach specific portions of the scriptures and other curriculum materials.

Second, faculty members are being encouraged to thoroughly familiarize themselves with the prophetic emphases so that these principles naturally become part of their thought processes. This integration enables faculty to successfully mentor students—whether deliberately or spontaneously—both individually and in groups. For

example, when students are seeking answers to important personal decisions, such as what subject to major in, whom to marry, or where to live or work, faculty can encourage them to begin by cultivating a willingness to let God’s will prevail in their lives. Additionally, when students have questions about how to share their beliefs with others, faculty can expertly model teaching the gospel with confidence and love. Faculty can also encourage students and provide opportunities for them to develop their own abilities to share the gospel with love, whether in person or online. And finally, faculty are being encouraged to design course materials that empower students to actively take charge of their own testimonies by providing specific opportunities to grow and strengthen their testimonies in every religion class.

Finally, faculty members are being given opportunities to share the way they emphasize prophetic teachings in their courses through an electronic database where teaching ideas are uploaded and stored. This database allows faculty to efficiently discover what their colleagues are doing to teach the prophetic emphases in their classes, allowing them to identify new scriptural passages and teaching approaches that reinforce prophetic themes. Collaboration among faculty members has numerous advantages, including enhanced professional development, increased creativity in lesson planning, the exchange of best practices, elevated confidence, and increased student learning.³

In June 2023, during the CES Religious Educators Conference, Elder Neil L. Andersen reminded teachers that “the doctrine of Christ is found in the scriptures and in the teachings of the prophets, whose responsibility it is to communicate the will of the Lord. . . . The Lord’s directions for questions and concerns in our modern world come from those who have been ordained with apostolic authority. If confidence in the prophets and apostles is waning, the distractions, the misdirections, and the sophistries of the world can detach [our students] from [their] spiritual moorings.”⁴ The main objective for encouraging the Religious Education faculty to consistently incorporate the five prophetic emphases into their teaching and mentoring is to help students remain firmly anchored to Jesus Christ and to his living prophets. ❧

Notes

1. The Teaching and Mentoring Professorship is a two-year appointment extended to one faculty member by the Deans’ Office in Religious Education. Dr. Martin assumed this role in September 2024.
2. Clark G. Gilbert, “A Prophet in the Land: Current Prophetic Emphases to Young Adults,” Seminaries & Institutes annual broadcast, January 27, 2023, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/broadcasts/s-and-i-training/2022/01/13gilbert>.
3. “Seven Benefits of Collaborative Teaching,” Inclusive Schools Network, August 27, 2015, <https://inclusiveschools.org/resource/7-benefits-of-collaborative-teaching/>.
4. Neil L. Andersen, “The Power of Jesus Christ and Pure Doctrine,” June 11, 2023, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/broadcasts/language-recording/2023/06/12andersen?lang=eng>.

Accessing Living Water with *Y Religion*

By Leigh Ann Copas

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DURING HIS CONVERSATION WITH the woman at the well, Jesus set forth the invitation that “whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life” (John 4:14). The living water that is offered to the Samaritan woman and to each of us is “the words of eternal life, the message of salvation, the truths about God and his kingdom; it is the doctrines of the gospel.”¹ The Guide to the Scriptures clarifies that living water is “a symbol of the Lord Jesus Christ and His teachings. As water is essential to sustain physical life, the Savior and His teachings (living water) are essential for eternal life.”² The Lord has and will continue to provide multiple wells of living water for those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.

Each year, students, faculty, staff, and community members tap into the aquifers of living water through the classes, events, and faculty publications from BYU Religious Education. The mission of Religious Education is to “assist individuals in their efforts to come unto Christ by teaching the

scriptures, doctrine, and history of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ through classroom instruction, gospel scholarship, and outreach to the larger community.”³ The faculty use a variety of publication mediums and social media platforms such as the *Y Religion* podcast to reach local and global audiences. Access to these reservoirs of truth provide nourishment as we study the scriptures, Church history and doctrine, and gospel living principles.

Nearly one hundred years after the Latter-day Saint University in Salt Lake City acquired the first US broadcast license for an educational institution,⁴ Religious Education launched the *Y Religion* podcast in February 2020. BYU and the Church have enjoyed a long history of using multimedia facets to share the gospel and testify of Christ. Now entering its sixth season, *Y Religion* has produced 119 episodes (and counting), highlighting the publications and research of Religious Education professors on subjects related to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. With over 2.3 million downloads from listeners in 193 countries, *Y Religion* helps fulfill the university mission

“to assist individuals in their quest for perfection and eternal life”⁵ and the Churchwide mission “to invite all people to follow Jesus Christ by teaching his gospel”⁶ by connecting listeners with gospel resources. Audiences have spent over 1.8 million hours listening to over 91 hours of content since *Y Religion*’s initial launch. Each episode is organized in three parts: why the research was done, why it matters, and why the researcher continues to follow Christ. New episodes are published on the first and fifteenth of each month across multiple podcast platforms, and faculty guests discuss a wide variety of gospel topics.

For those unable to attend BYU or other Church-led religion courses, or for those wanting to explore supplemental resources for their personal study, *Y Religion* provides free, direct access to gospel scholars. Some of the common themes or topics covered by faculty include scriptural insight and interpretations, translations, historical context, doctrinal studies and analysis, interfaith dialogues, family and social dynamics, and mental health and wellness.



Christ and the woman at the well. Courtesy of Intellectual Reserve, Inc.

Scriptural Insight and Interpretations

In these episodes, faculty members provide in-depth analysis, historical context, and textual interpretations of scriptures from antiquity and from the Restoration. With these materials, seekers of truth can come to know Christ, better understand his gospel, and receive personal revelation. “The scriptures contain the words of Christ and are a reservoir of living water to which we have ready access and from which we can drink deeply and long. . . . By reading, studying, searching, and feasting upon the words of Christ . . . , we can receive both spiritual direction and protection during our mortal journey.”⁷ Audiences might use the episodes and featured resources in their Sunday School discussions, religious education classes, or personal and small-group

study. A few episodes to explore include the following:

- Ep. 118: The Doctrine and Covenants as Living Scripture (Casey Griffiths)
- Ep. 61: Refugee Treatment Under the Mosaic Law (Krystal Pierce)
- Ep. 54: Confronting Prejudice with Samuel the Lamanite (Jan Martin)
- Ep. 20: The Greek Texts of the New Testament (Lincoln Blumell)
- Ep. 5: Women Expounding Scripture (Amy Easton-Flake)

Church History and Doctrinal Studies

Audiences can connect with a rich array of narratives and gain a more holistic view of the Restoration by listening to these episodes. Scholars of Church history and doctrine

discuss the need for and the processes of restoring the primitive Church. Some of the research topics covered include exploring sacred places, analyzing scripture of the restored gospel, understanding historical figures, embracing ongoing modern revelation, organizing and governing the Church, initiating missionary work, spreading the gospel to a global audience, and so on. Further, individuals might find answers to questions they have about sensitive topics and gospel principles, as well as applications to their own lives, by engaging more deeply with the principles of salvation. Scholars discuss both historical and contemporary issues through a faith-based lens that models how we might also examine such topics.

We *give* place for learning history by thinking about our relationship

to the past. We *plant* the seed in our minds and hearts through careful reading and reflection. We can *discern* the importance of our reading by considering how authentic and reliable the source is, placing our answers in proper historical contexts, and identifying eternal principles that can be applied to our personal circumstances.⁸

A few examples of episodes centered on Church history and doctrine include the following:

- Ep. 115: A Woman’s Influence on the Delivery of the Family Proclamation (Barbara Morgan Gardner and Olivia Osguthorpe)
- Ep. 93: Search, Ponder, and Pray in Holy Places (Mary Jane Woodger)
- Ep. 82: The Saints of Las Vegas (Fred Woods)
- *Ep. 66: D&C 84 and the Priesthood Power of Women (Barbara Morgan Gardner)
- Ep. 8: The Spirit of Sacred Sites (Craig Ostler)

Interfaith Dialogues and Learning

Prophets and apostles have called for worldwide religious liberty and harmony since the organization of the Church. “We claim the privilege of worshipping Almighty God according to the dictates of our own conscience, and allow all men the same privilege, let them worship how, where, or what they may” (Articles of Faith 1:11). Interfaith dialogues

**Indicates the top five most downloaded episodes*

and relationships allow for fellow believers to view each other as contemporaries and partners of good causes, rather than competitors, in caring for God’s children. People of different faiths and beliefs are invited to build common ground and unify in peacemaking efforts. “The spiritual and physical needs of the world require goodwill and cooperation among different faiths. Each of them makes a valuable contribution to the larger community of believers.”⁹ Some excellent resources on building interfaith relationships while maintaining our doctrinal foundations include

- Ep. 114: Learning from People of Other Faiths (Joshua M. Sears)
- Ep. 103: An Interfaith Approach to Keeping the Sabbath Day Holy (Andrew Reed)
- Ep. 76: Commemorating Holy Week (Eric Huntsman)
- Ep. 56: Community of Christ and the First Vision (Keith Wilson)

Personal and Spiritual Development

Sister Kathleen H. Hughes explains that “the living water is the gospel of Jesus Christ; its communicator is the Holy Ghost.”¹⁰ Studying the scriptures, Church history, and gospel doctrine aids in our development of personal revelation through the guidance of the Holy Ghost. Audiences can learn more about recognizing the prompting of the Holy Ghost using tips from faculty research and insights. As such, the Holy Ghost can “guide us in our decisions and protect us from physical and spiritual danger.”¹¹ As the great Comforter, the Holy Ghost can

“calm our fears and fill us with hope”¹² as we navigate through our lives.

- Ep. 119: Hear Him! The Restored Voice of the Lord (Anthony Sweat)
- Ep. 96: Helping Students Grow Without Growing Their Stress (Rob Eaton)
- Ep. 85: A Guide to Book of Mormon Studies (Joseph Spencer)
- *Ep. 80: Living Our Temple Covenants (Anthony Sweat)
- Ep. 75: Holiness to the Lord (Gaye Strathearn)
- *Ep. 46: “Answers About Patriarchal Blessings” (Brad Wilcox)

Family and Social Dynamics

“The family is sacred in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and is the most important social unit in time and eternity.”¹³ In the following episodes, faculty discuss the influence of family in religious practice, parental responsibility, the eternal perspective of family, and family history, along with home evening and *Come, Follow Me* practices for supporting a home-centered, church-supported gospel.

- Ep. 108: Intentional Fatherhood (Mark D. Ogletree)
- Ep. 102: Strengthening Marriage (Jenet Erickson and Jason Carroll)
- Ep. 84: Models of Motherhood (Avram and Thora Shannon)
- Ep. 72: The Transmission of Faith from Parents to Children (Byran Korth)
- *Ep. 52: Living the Abrahamic Covenant (Kerry Muhlestein)
- *Ep. 47: Expanding Understanding of Eve (Amy Easton-Flake and Mark Ellison)

- Ep. 24: Joseph Smith’s Growing Understanding of the Eternal Family (Devan Jensen and Michael Goodman)

Mental Health and Physical Wellness

In addition to nourishing our spiritual needs, the Lord provides guidance for nurturing our mental, emotional, and physical wellness. President Russell M. Nelson has taught that “we are dual beings. Each soul is comprised of body and spirit, both of which emanate from God.”¹⁴ Leading researchers, such as Professor Justin Dyer, combine scientific research with gospel principles and scripture as they discuss the impact of religion on mental health and similar topics. They provide messages of love, hope, compassion, and understanding as they explore ways in which nourishing our spirits can aid in nourishing our physical, mental, and emotional needs. “Spiritual habits don’t necessarily make our challenges go away, but they do give us the strength, mental clarity, eternal perspective, hope, and courage to move forward.”¹⁵ Audiences can gain a variety of tips, practical steps, and personal applications by reviewing the episodes below:

- Ep. 101: Jacob and Mental Health (Jared Halverson)
- Ep. 97: The Power of Stillness (Ty Mansfield)
- Ep. 87: Mental Health and Latter-day Saints (Justin Dyer)
- Ep. 42: God’s Grace and Mental Health (Daniel Judd)
- Ep. 13: Wildlife and the Word of Wisdom (Andrew Hedges)

Audiences can connect with a rich array of narratives and gain a more holistic view of the Restoration by listening to these episodes.

Conclusion

The Lord has instructed, “If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water” (John 7:37–38). *Y Religion* is one reservoir that brings together the research, insights, and testimonies of BYU Religious Education faculty for the everyday seeker of truth.

The *Y Religion* podcast is led by host and producer John Hilton III. The committee includes BYU Religious Education faculty Jenet Erickson, Casey Griffiths, Jared Halverson, Travis Searle, Ryan Sharp, Hank Smith, and Brad Wilcox. Promotional materials are created and posted by Leigh Ann Copas and Bekah Black from the Religious Studies Center. *Y Religion* would not be possible without the generous contributions of BYU students; the sound recording, mixing, and original music from Alec Galloway and Ethan Arkell; and original music and scoring by Grant Kaggale, Sam Claussen, Collette Jones, and Alastair Scheuermann. ✂

Notes

1. Bruce R. McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary* (Bookcraft, 1965), 1:151–52.
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5. “BYU Mission Statement,” www.byu.edu.
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7. David A. Bednar, “A Reservoir of Living Water,” Brigham Young University devotional, February 4, 2007, <https://speeches.byu.edu>.
8. Keith A. Erekson, “A Pattern for Learning Church History by Study and Faith,” www.churchofjesuschrist.org; emphasis in original.
9. “Interfaith Relations,” Newsroom, www.churchofjesuschrist.org.
10. Kathleen H. Hughes, “Blessed by Living Water,” general conference talk, April 2023, www.churchofjesuschrist.org.
11. “What Are the Roles of the Holy Ghost?,” Come Follow Me—For Aaronic Priesthood, www.churchofjesuschrist.org.
12. “What Are the Roles of the Holy Ghost?”
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14. Russell M. Nelson, “We Are Children of God,” general conference talk, October 1998, www.churchofjesuschrist.org.
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FINDING FAITH

By Jared M. Halverson

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PART EXPLANATION, PART INVITATION, AND PERHAPS part plaintive sigh, the conclusion of the parable of the importune widow is a question, haunting in its vulnerability: “When the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?” (Luke 18:8). Prophets and poets alike have bemoaned the long-prophesied latter-day loss of faith, from Paul’s warning that “in the latter times some shall depart from the faith” (1 Timothy 4:1) to Matthew Arnold’s lament that where once “the Sea of Faith” was “at the full,” by his day he could “only hear / Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar.”¹

Against this darkening backdrop, the Restoration burst forth as “the dawning of a brighter day,” as we see when we open our hymnals.² Or even more dramatically, open your Doctrine and Covenants and see the Lord answer his earlier question in the book’s preface: Will the Lord find faith on the earth when he comes? Most assuredly, since one of the Restoration’s primary purposes is “that faith also might increase in the earth” (Doctrine and Covenants 1:21).

No wonder realizing this grand objective is one of the central aims of Religious Education in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. As prophets and apostles have recently charged, teachers of the restored gospel are to “strengthen [students’] ability to find answers, resolve doubts, respond with faith, and give reason for the hope within them in whatever challenges they may face.”³ To anyone following the troubling trends of religious affiliation—downward arrows almost everywhere we look⁴—increased efforts to fortify faith need no justification. What we need is implementation, and across the Church Educational System, that is precisely what we see.

In seminary classrooms throughout the Church, students are participating in a Doctrinal Mastery program whereby they learn and practice principles of acquiring

spiritual knowledge.⁵ An Innovate Institute program is increasing opportunities for college-age young adults to ask questions and explore issues in an environment that emphasizes accessibility, belonging, relevance, and above all, deep and lasting “conversion to Jesus Christ and his restored gospel.”⁶ At BYU campuses, four required cornerstone classes proactively address relevant principles, exploring doctrinal issues in “Christ and His Everlasting Gospel” and “Teachings and Doctrine of the Book of Mormon,” historical issues in “Foundations of the Restoration,” and social issues in “The Eternal Family”—each course intended to fortify students’ faith.

Among members of the religion faculty at BYU’s Provo campus, individual faith-strengthening efforts abound both inside and outside the classroom. Professors are creating learning activities and giving assignments



Teachers are charged to teach students how to find answers. Courtesy of Intellectual Reserve, Inc.



Jared Halverson, a religion professor, speaks for a live podcast at the Salt Palace for the Utah Area's 2024 young single adult conference. Courtesy of Intellectual Reserve, Inc.

Teachers of the restored gospel are to “strengthen [students’] ability to find answers, resolve doubts, respond with faith, and give reason for the hope within them in whatever challenges they may face.”

specifically intended to help students “find answers [and] resolve doubts.”⁷ Books and articles—both scholarly and devotional—extend those efforts to a wider readership, while conferences and symposia offer similar blessings to all who attend. Furthermore, technology is proving that at BYU “the world is our campus,” as a growing number of faculty-led podcasts strengthen the faith of listeners worldwide. The *Y Religion* podcast highlights recent publications by members of the BYU religion faculty, many of whom have also appeared as guest lecturers on Hank Smith and John Bytheway’s *Follow Him* podcast, which follows the Church’s *Come, Follow Me* curriculum. Tony Sweat and John Hilton III have posted complete religion

courses on YouTube, and Tyler Griffin has taught the entire standard works to Scripture Central’s worldwide audience. Other faculty-hosted podcasts address a wide variety of subjects meant to teach truth and fortify faith: Gerrit Dirkmaat’s *Standard of Truth*, Barbara Morgan Gardner’s *Grounded*, Casey Griffith’s *Church History Matters* (with BYU–Idaho’s Scott Woodward), Kerry Muhlestein’s *The Scriptures Are Real*, and Stephan Taeger’s *RVVL* (with Dave Butler), to name but a few. As Tyler Griffin observed in a recent conversation, thanks to technology’s ability to extend the walls of our classrooms, it is likely that more people are spending more time in the scriptures today than at any period of the earth’s

history—millions eagerly “try[ing] the virtue of the word of God” (Alma 31:5).

In my own case, the *Unshaken* podcast preceded my time at BYU, but from the start, my hope was to help Church members say with the Book of Mormon prophet Jacob that their faith “could not be shaken” (Jacob 7:5). My graduate work in American religious history focused on secularization and antireligious rhetoric, so I am keenly aware of the challenges faced by the faithful and have long wanted to do all I can to see that faith might increase on the earth. After nearly five years of weekly podcasting, I am amazed to see the worldwide response to these collective efforts, especially among those who had been questioning their faith or even thinking of ending their Church membership. Based on an ongoing avalanche of comments, emails, social media messages, and individual phone calls and office visits, I can affirm that despite these days of doubt, the word of God is having “powerful effect upon the minds of the people” (Alma 31:5)—just as prophesied.

Beyond witnessing the renewed faith of the formerly faltering, I have been equally inspired by the desire of so many Saints to steady those who are shaken around them. I am frequently invited to train ward and stake leaders, institute of religion faculties, and other groups interested in helping people maintain their hold on the iron rod. In what originally felt like an odd request, the BYU School of Accountancy recently asked me to present information to the faculty on helping students through a faith crisis—precisely because their students are coming to *them* seeking just that sort of assistance (yes, I had to ask!). Fittingly (I learned once I had made the connection), students are not taking their spiritual questions exclusively to their religion professors; rather, they are going to those who are “example[s] of the believers” (1 Timothy 4:12) within their respective disciplines, eager to know how these faith-filled mentors have balanced scholarship and discipleship in the fields these students are pursuing.

All of this bodes well for the future of faith, as parents and professors, leaders and loved ones, all embrace the spirit of James 1:5 by creating environments of openness wherein sincere seekers can ask life’s most meaningful—and vulnerable—questions. In this they are following the

example of Jesus himself, whose question about faith inspires our quest to increase it. Thankfully, the end of that quest is as assured as the answers to those questions. As Elder Neal A. Maxwell once observed (calling it “the irony of ironies”), this so-called “post-Christian era . . . will come to an abrupt end” with the glorious coming of Christ.⁸ And yes, in that moment, the Savior *will* find faith on the earth. The community of faith—every one of us—will collectively see to that. ✂



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5. See “Doctrinal Mastery Core Document,” www.churchofjesuschrist.org.
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7. “Strengthening Religious Education.”
8. Neal A. Maxwell, “The Book of Mormon: A Great Answer to ‘The Great Question,’” in Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate Jr., *The Book of Mormon: First Nephi, the Doctrinal Foundation* (Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1988), 2.



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FACULTY AND STAFF

AWARDS

Jeffrey R. Chadwick received the Brigham Young University Creative Teaching Award for 2024.

Carmen Durland Cole was recognized for ten years of service.

Byron B. Korth was presented with the Brigham Award at the University’s “Unforum,” April 16, 2024. The Brigham Awards is an annual award for distinguished outstanding service. Members of the campus community nominate their peers who embody Christlike charity and who serve the people of the campus community in consistent, quiet, and unheralded ways.

Andrew C. Reed was named the Richard L. Evans Chair of Religious Understanding.

Jordan T. Watkins was awarded the Mormon History Association’s Best Article Published in the *Journal of Mormon History* for 2023. His article is titled “Slavery, Early Latter-day Saint Constitutionalism, and the Limits of the Right to Petition,” *Journal of Mormon History* 49 no. 3 (2023): 47–102.

Fred E. Woods received the Brigham Young University Creative Works Award, 2024.

Fred E. Woods was given the John Topham and Susan Redd Butler BYU Faculty Research Award for research and content on *Saints by State* website, 2024.

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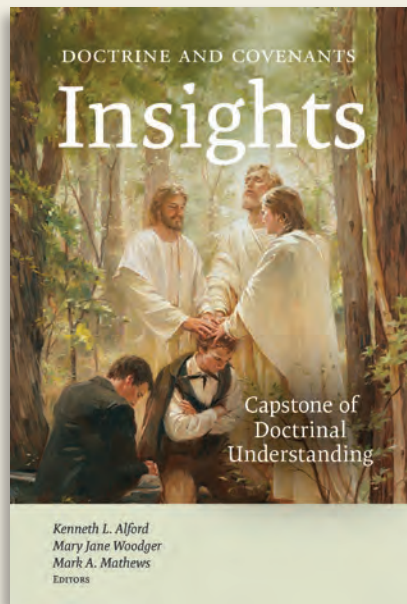
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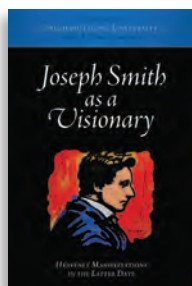
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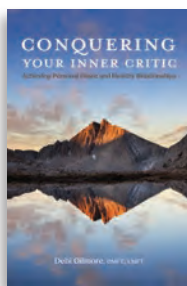


**Joseph Smith
as a Visionary:
Heavenly
Manifestations
in the Latter
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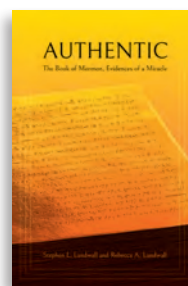


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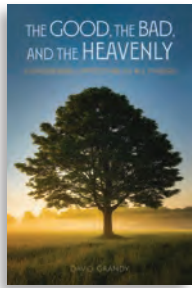


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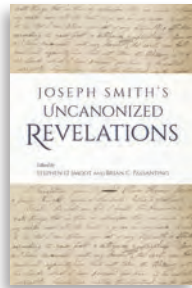


The Good, the Bad, and the Heavenly: Considering Opposition in All Things

DAVID GRANDY

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exploration of Lehi’s teaching that “opposition in all things” structures the world and enables our salvation (2 Nephi 2:2). A single uniform state can’t deliver the goods of salvation—life, happiness, meaning, intelligence. We need a compound-in-one experience in which we are challenged, stretched, and sometimes even puzzled. Given its soul-stretching complexity, mortality is not a world in which there is a right answer to every ideological or intellectual question; it is rather a living laboratory for the development of kindness, forgiveness, empathy, and charity. To this end Grandy takes a fresh look at fundamental gospel principles to show how they are admirably adapted to the intrinsically uncertain world we live in. As followers of the Savior, we have everything we need—the good, the bad, and the gospel of Jesus Christ, which teaches us how to transmute the earthly dross of sin and hardship into heavenly gold. US \$22.99



Joseph Smith's Uncanonized Revelations

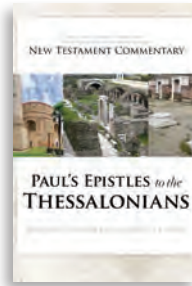
EDITED BY
STEPHEN O.
SMOOT AND
BRIAN C.
PASSANTINO

The revelations

formally canonized in the Doctrine and Covenants are of tremendous value and importance for the spiritual and ecclesiastical affairs of the Latter-day Saints. Something that might come as a surprise to many members of the Church, however, is the fact that Joseph Smith recorded dozens of revelations that, for a variety of reasons, went unpublished or uncanonized during his lifetime. Although perhaps not as well known, these texts are also important in helping Latter-day Saints appreciate Joseph Smith as a modern revelator and prophet. They are also valuable to scholars and historians seeking to understand Joseph Smith’s role as an American religious leader. These uncanonized revelations are the subject of this volume, which, building on the groundwork laid by the Joseph Smith Papers Project, aims to assemble these texts and make them accessible for Latter-day Saints who are looking to confirm and strengthen their testimonies in Joseph Smith as God’s prophet. US \$24.99



FROM BYU STUDIES



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RICHARD D.
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Paul wrote to the Thessalonians

with force, insight, power, and love. The Thessalonian epistles dwell on the hope these people found in the gospel of Christ and emphasize the meaning of what being a Christian meant during a time of great persecution. In this BYU Studies New Testament Commentary volume, Professors Richard Draper and Michael Rhodes explain Paul’s ideas to the modern reader. This work is the first comprehensive study of Thessalonians ever produced by Latter-day Saint scholars. In addition to providing commentary on every verse, it includes a rendering of the preserved Greek text into modern English. The authors’ new rendition is set side by side with the King James Version for easy comparison.

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Mentoring Helps Emma Explore a New Career

When Emma Clark discovered her STEM-oriented studies were not a good fit, she described her reaction in one word—“panic.”

Her father, a doctor, had instilled in her a love for science. However, she soon realized that science was not her strong suit. She decided to wipe the slate and reevaluate her options.

While she perused the BYU catalog, a major in editing and publishing caught her eye. She took a few classes, and it felt like a good match. “I’ve always enjoyed writing, not necessarily for fun, but writing for clarity and in a way that presents my ideas well.”

Now fully invested in this new career path, Emma felt it important to get some experience. A friend mentioned a paid internship opportunity at the BYU

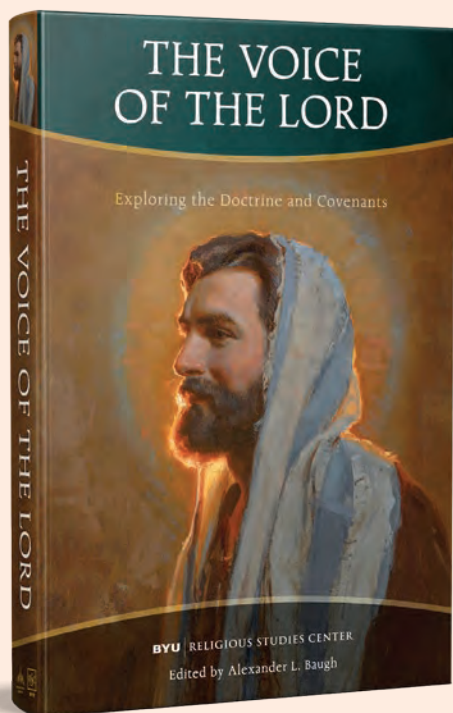
Religious Studies Center. These experiences are largely donor funded, and Emma appreciated that this job would help support her new little family as she and her husband work toward degrees at BYU. She got the position.

“I came to BYU on a scholarship, which was very helpful. Being able to work and earn money while getting experience that will help me get a job may be even more helpful,” she says.

Emma appreciates that BYU students are here “because people have given so much for us to be here,” adding, “It is difficult for donors to see the impact donations have on individual students, but it is really easy for students to see how great an impact they have on us.”

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THE VOICE OF THE LORD



This volume of essays provides insight into selected revelations canonized in the Doctrine and Covenants. Contributors explore topics such as Elijah's visitation in the Kirtland Temple, the sacred location of Adam-ondi-Ahman, priesthood power of women, Satan's reality, the establishment of Zion, and plural marriage. Authors also examine the historical context of consecration, sacramental covenants, baptism for the dead, redemption of the dead, and the three degrees of heavenly glory. The articles combine to show that from the very beginning of the Restoration, our prophets' inspired words are "the will of the Lord, . . . the mind of the Lord, . . . the voice of the Lord, and the power of God unto salvation" (Doctrine and Covenants 68:4).

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