

BYU RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

FALL 2025

REVIEW

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

150 Years
of Faith and
Discipleship



Administrative Adjustments Coupled with Appreciation



THE 2025–26 ACADEMIC YEAR AT BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY PROMISES to be historic. The campus community will celebrate its sesquicentennial, appropriately pausing to reflect on our past, evaluate our present, and chart a course for our future. To guide these activities, the campus has repeatedly returned to President Spencer W. Kimball's prophetic address "The Second Century of Brigham Young University," delivered at BYU's centennial celebration in 1975. We have scoured its language describing the gifts and needs of students in BYU's second century, as well as the charges delivered to the faculty to "become a unique university in all of the world."¹

Recently, because of a host of administrative changes in Religious Education, I found myself returning to President Kimball's talk, wondering what he said about leadership. His message included this observation: "You are headed in the right direction! Such academic adjustments as need to be made will be made out of the individual and collective wisdom we find when a dedicated faculty interacts with a wise administration, an inspired governing board, and an appreciative body of students."²

In my four years as dean, my love for that appreciative study body has deepened, as has my gratitude for a dedicated faculty and an inspired governing board. This year, however, I have also come to value the "wise administration" about which President Kimball also spoke. Our administration in Religious Education is changing significantly. Associate dean Gaye Strathearn, department chair Shon Hopkin, and associate department chair Frank Judd are all stepping down to assume leadership and teaching roles at the BYU Jerusalem Center for Near Eastern Studies. In their places, new leadership has been appointed: Lincoln Blumell as associate dean, Kerry Hull as department chair, and Ryan Sharp as associate department chair. While I look forward to counseling with and learning from our new administrators, I will miss my daily interactions with Gaye, Shon, and Frank in the leadership of Religious Education. Their "individual and collective wisdom," as described by President Kimball, has moved Religious Education toward "Becoming BYU"—that is, the "Christ-centered, prophetically directed university" about which President C. Shane Reese has repeatedly spoken.³ I know I am more Christ-centered and better prophetically directed from having served with them, and I believe our students, faculty, and campus community are as well. Thank you for your wise administration of BYU Religious Education. ☸

Scott C. Esplin
Scott C. Esplin
Dean, BYU Religious Education

BYU

Religious Education

Notes

1. Spencer W. Kimball, "The Second Century of Brigham Young University," BYU Founders Day address, October 10, 1975, <https://speeches.byu.edu>.
2. Kimball, "Second Century of Brigham Young University."
3. C. Shane Reese, "Becoming BYU: An Inaugural Response," BYU inauguration devotional address, September 19, 2023, <https://speeches.byu.edu>.

REVIEW

BYU Religious Education Review
A Publication of the Religious Studies Center

rsc.byu.edu/review



HISTORIAN'S CORNER

Idaho Regional Studies in Church History

By R. Devan Jensen and
Alexander L. Baugh



FEATURE

BYU Religious Education Beacons of Light

By Tyler Griffin



RESEARCH UPDATE

Lebolo Conference

By Kerry Muhlestein

Editor's Note 2

A Season of Celebration and Renewal

By Jared W. Ludlow

Free Events 3

Faculty and Staff Highlights 4

RSC Book Update 10

This Great and Lasting War

By Emma Clark

Gospel Teaching 20

The Religious Educator—A Quarter Century of Refinement

By Leigh Ann Copas

Teaching & Mentoring 24

Numbering, Naming, and Nourishing

By Scott Esplin

RSC Book Update 26

From Wilderness to Monarchy

By Aaron Schade and Dan Belnap

Special Event 28

An Evening of Celebration

By Becky Isom Call

Outreach 30

Presenting *Y Religion Presents*

By Anthony Sweat

Notes: Faculty and Staff 36

Recent and Upcoming Publications 37

Published by BYU's Religious Studies Center on behalf of BYU's Religious Education

RELIGIOUS STUDIES CENTER

Founded in 1975 by
Jeffrey R. Holland

Publications Director
Jared W. Ludlow

Associate Publications Director

Michael A. Goodman

REVIEW MAGAZINE

Editor
Jared W. Ludlow

Managing Editor
Brent R. Nordgren

Editors

Don L. Brugger
Becky Isom Call

R. Devan Jensen

Publications Coordinator
Leigh Ann Copas

Photographers

Brent R. Nordgren
Richard B. Crookston

Student Editors

Emma Clark
Elise Green

DESIGN & PRODUCTION

Hales Creative, LLC

Design Director

Kelly Nield

To obtain a free subscription for BYU Religious Education Review, please visit review.byu.edu or call 801-422-6975.

A SEASON OF CELEBRATION AND RENEWAL

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

BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY IS celebrating its 150th anniversary this year! BYU continues to be a key component within The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints to not only educate some of its members in academic fields but also provide a strong focus on spiritual learning and development. The university exists because of the Church, and the Church is strengthened by BYU and its graduates going forth to serve. Yet both premises would not be true if the university broke off its close relationship with the Church or if its faculty, staff, and graduates did not strengthen their testimonies as part of their BYU experience. Humility is required to realize the need for prophetic direction in the university leadership and in one's private life. Academia can too easily lead one to slip into thinking one knows everything and is better than others. But Jesus Christ taught that to truly

succeed and prepare for our divine destinies, we must become as little children and serve those around us. A covenant we make with God is not a diploma we put on the wall to mark a completed course of study, but rather it is a living, vibrant relationship that continues to guide and bless us.

Our efforts to seek spiritual knowledge, connection, and experiences help us draw closer to our Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ. Religious Education at BYU and the BYU Religious Studies Center aim to support the discipleship development of both those at the university and beyond. As we celebrate this sesquicentennial year, may we renew our efforts to fulfill the prophetic destiny of this special university and to strengthen our personal covenant relationships with Deity.

This issue of the *Review* magazine highlights some of the accomplishments of Religious Education over



Jared W. Ludlow

the university's 150-year history. In addition, Scott Esplin discusses recent changes pertaining to the professional teaching faculty in Religious Education. We also hear about new teaching ideas shared via the *Y Religion* podcast. One article reports on a recent regional Church history trip taken by faculty from Church History and Doctrine through many parts of Idaho where Church members have played significant roles. Kerry Muhlestein shares his

May we renew our efforts to fulfill the prophetic destiny of this special university and to strengthen our personal covenant relationships with Deity.

perspective on a recent conference held in Italy honoring Antonio Lebolo, who was instrumental in the chain of events leading to the Church's acquisition of the papyri related to the Book of Abraham. We highlight a few upcoming books: a Book of Mormon Academy volume on the so-called war chapters in the Book of Mormon and a collection of essays on the Old Testament, *From Wilderness to Monarchy*, covering the books of Joshua through Kings.

With respect to other anniversaries, we also share a little about the twenty-fifth year of the *Religious Educator* journal, which is published three times a year, and the celebratory banquet the RSC held to mark its fiftieth-year anniversary. ☺



Jared W. Ludlow

Publications Director

BYU Religious Studies Center

Free Events

2026 BYU Religious Education Symposium

in Honor of Sidney B. Sperry

Friday–Saturday, January 23–24, 2026

Since 1973 the BYU Sidney B. Sperry Symposium has grown to become a premier venue for Latter-day Saint religious studies. The symposium began as an effort to encourage faith-based religious scholarship on Latter-day Saint topics. The 2026 theme is "Tender Mercies and Loving-Kindness: The Goodness of God in the Old Testament." The symposium is free, and no registration is required.



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: Michael J. Biggerstaff

MICHAEL J. BIGGERSTAFF (*michael_biggerstaff@byu.edu*) IS AN ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF ANCIENT SCRIPTURE AT BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY.



MICHAEL J. BIGGERSTAFF IS A SCHOLAR OF THE HEBREW BIBLE AND THE ancient Near East. He received a PhD in Near Eastern languages and cultures with a graduate interdisciplinary specialization in ancient Mediterranean religions from The Ohio State University, an MA in religion (Hebrew Bible) from Vanderbilt University, and a BA in ancient Near Eastern studies from Brigham Young University. Michael's primary research interests focus on prophecy and prophetic writings in ancient Israel and across the ancient Near East, including their interpretation in Second Temple Judaism and early Christianity. He also researches topics relating to divination, magic, mythology, and religious diversity in the ancient world. Michael met his wife, Rachel, when they were undergraduates studying abroad at the BYU Jerusalem Center. They live in Spanish Fork, Utah, with their four children. ☀

Faculty Highlight: David M. Calabro

DAVID M. CALABRO (*david_calabro@byu.edu*) IS AN ASSISTANT PROFESSOR IN THE DEPARTMENT OF ANCIENT SCRIPTURE WITH AN APPOINTMENT TO THE BYU JERUSALEM CENTER.



DAVID M. CALABRO IS A SCHOLAR OF THE ANCIENT WORLDS OF THE scriptures with special interest in the Bible and the Pearl of Great Price. A native of Sterling, Virginia, he served in the Washington Tacoma Mission from 1995 to 1997. He received a BA in Near Eastern studies from BYU in 2000, an MA in Hebrew Bible from Vanderbilt University in 2003, and a PhD in Near Eastern languages and civilizations from the University of Chicago in 2014. Before coming to BYU as a visiting professor in 2022, he was the curator of Eastern Christian manuscripts at the Hill Museum and Manuscript Library in Collegeville, Minnesota. David and his wife, the former Ruth Knapp, have seven children. David loves to do family history, go on adventures with his family, and practice martial arts. He also enjoys reading and writing fantasy/sci-fi novels with his family. ☀

Faculty Highlight: Sherilyn Farnes

SHERILYN FARNES (sherilyn.farnes@byu.edu) IS AN ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF CHURCH HISTORY AND DOCTRINE AT BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY.



SHERILYN FARNES JOINED THE DEPARTMENT OF CHURCH HISTORY AND Doctrine as an assistant professor in 2025. She loves teaching, her students, and the gospel, and especially merging all three. She earned a BA in history teaching and an MA in history, both from Brigham Young University. After working in public history, including as a writer for *Saints: The Story of the Church of Jesus Christ in the Latter Days*, she earned a PhD in US history from Texas Christian University. She served as the managing editor for the Wilford Woodruff Papers Project in its initial phases, organizing the creation of the website and the preparation of hundreds of pages of images, transcriptions, and linked subject matter topics. Her research specialties include the lives of Edward and Lydia Partridge and their children, as well as the ways that inhabitants of Jackson County, Missouri, interacted and crossed cultural, religious, and geographic borders in the early nineteenth century. She loves being with family and friends, spending time in nature, and playing pickleball. ☀

Staff Highlight: Nick White

NICK WHITE (nick.white@byu.edu) IS THE IT ADMINISTRATOR IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION AT BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY.



NICK WHITE WAS BORN IN SOUTH CAROLINA BUT RAISED IN EL DORADO Hills, California. He attended Brigham Young University, where he met his beautiful wife, Cami, their freshman year. She was the family home evening leader in his freshman ward and insists that he never attended (this is up for debate). He served his mission in Cuiabá, Brazil, where he learned to love people and the gospel. After returning from his mission, Nick reconnected with Cami and eventually convinced her to marry him. They were married in the Payson Utah Temple and are the parents to the goofiest boy, Tate, and are expecting identical twin girls. Nick began his career at General Motors in Georgia working as a systems engineer. He quickly became the leading resource managing the Power BI platform for the Finance IT division. While at GM, he focused on PowerShell automation and cloud platforms. After deciding to move closer to family and the mountains at the end of 2024, Nick accepted a position as IT administrator in Religious Education, where he manages the websites, maintains devices, and assists with technical issues. ☀

Idaho Regional Studies in Church History: A Journey Through Sacred Landscapes

By R. Devan Jensen and Alexander L. Baugh

R. DEVAN JENSEN (devan_jensen@byu.edu) IS THE EXECUTIVE EDITOR AT THE RELIGIOUS STUDIES CENTER. ALEXANDER L. BAUGH (alex_baugh@byu.edu) IS A PROFESSOR OF CHURCH HISTORY AT BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY.

THE YEAR 2025 MARKED A milestone in Idaho as the state's population surpassed the two million mark (2,032,120). Significantly, Latter-day Saint membership in the state numbers 481,049, representing nearly 24 percent of the population and making it just behind Utah and California in the number of Church members. Currently there are 142 stakes, 1,224 wards, fifty branches, three missions, six operating temples, and another five under construction or recently announced.

Beginning in 1860, the influence of the Latter-day Saints in Idaho, both past and present, has been nothing short of monumental. To learn more about that history, from July 28 to August 3, faculty members from the Department of Church History and Doctrine at BYU and BYU–Idaho embarked on an intensive and educational tour of historical sites across Idaho. The Idaho Regional Studies in Church History Tour aimed to deepen understanding of the unfolding history of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, pioneer settlements, Indigenous cultures,

and the Oregon Trail in the Gem State. The journey blended spiritual insight, scholarly discussion, and historical reflection as participants visited cemeteries, homes, monuments, museums, sacred edifices, and historic buildings and landmarks.

Monday, July 28—Franklin County: Legacy and Landscape in the Church's First Idaho Settlement

The tour began in Franklin, Idaho, settled by the Latter-day Saints in 1860 and the state's oldest permanent settlement. Faculty members visited the Lorenzo Hill Hatch home and Franklin Relic Hall Museum, where Susan and Shawnee Hawkes discussed the legacy of early Church members and their leaders.

In nearby Whitney, Sherilyn Farnes provided background on the life of Church President Ezra Taft Benson, including his boyhood home and burial site. A stop in Preston highlighted the birthplace of Apostle Matthew Cowley, with commentary by Mark Ogletree, and the historic Oneida Stake Academy, presented by

Scott Esplin, Fred Woods, and local historian Necia Seamons. While in Preston, faculty paused at Preston High School, made famous by the cult classic *Napoleon Dynamite*. Nearby, they visited homes connected to the fictional characters Pedro Sanchez and Napoleon Dynamite, adding a light cultural note to a day rich in history.

A solemn and significant stop followed: the Bear River Massacre sites, where Ken Alford and Shoshone leader Darren Parry recounted the tragic events of January 1863 when US troops under the leadership of Col. Patrick E. Connor killed over four hundred Northwestern Shoshone men, women, and children. Parry emphasized the importance of the land's original stewards and their enduring presence in the region.

The tour continued to Red Rock Pass, where Devan Jensen explained that the pass was the epicenter of the Bonneville Flood. Water from Lake Bonneville burst through at a peak flow rate three times greater than the Amazon River. Tucked behind the pass lies a quiet cemetery where

Captain Jefferson Hunt, a Mormon Battalion leader, explorer, and settler of several Utah and Idaho towns, is buried and remembered with reverence.

Additional visits included the President Harold B. Lee memorial in Clifton, with remarks by Stephanie Sorensen, and a short jaunt over the Utah-Idaho border to visit the Three Witnesses monument in the Clarkston, Utah, cemetery, where Robert Smith paid tribute to Martin Harris, who was the last surviving witness to the Book of Mormon.

Tuesday, July 29—Bear Lake County: Tabernacles and Trails

The next leg took the group to Bear Lake County, passing through St. Charles, Idaho, the birthplace of sculptor Gutzon Borglum, famed for Mount Rushmore in South Dakota and Stone Mountain in Georgia.

In Paris, Idaho, participants explored the renowned Bear Lake Stake Tabernacle, designed by John Don Carlos Young, son of Brigham Young, and constructed under the direction of Apostle Charles C. Rich, whose monument stands nearby. Presentations by local guides LaMar Merrill and Spencer and Laurie Rich honored the tabernacle and Rich's pioneering spirit and leadership.

Later, the group traveled to Montpelier to tour the National Oregon and California Trail Center, where they learned about the hardships and hopes of westward migration. A visit to the Montpelier Tabernacle, with its historic Minerva Teichert murals, gave insight into faith and art in early

twentieth-century worship, with insights from professor and artist Anthony Sweat.

Craig Manscill led presentations in Soda Springs on the Morrisite historical markers—a reminder of schismatic divisions during the early Utah period—and the graves of Morrisite leader Neils Anderson and his wife Mary Christofferson, who led the Morrisite followers in Soda Springs. The group then viewed the famed Soda Springs Geyser.

Beginning in 1860, the influence of the Latter-day Saints in Idaho, both past and present, has been nothing short of monumental.

Wednesday, July 30—Eastern Idaho: Temples, Tribes, and Tubers

Eastern Idaho opened with a tour of the Fort Hall replica and Bannock County Historical Museum in Pocatello, showcasing the fur trade and Indigenous history of the region. The group also visited the Pocatello Idaho Temple, where Travis Searle and Ryan Gardner discussed initial opposition to the Latter-day Saints there and how the temple open house and dedication were followed by positive outreach efforts of the Portneuf Interfaith Fellowship toward the Latter-day Saints.

In Blackfoot the scholars explored a unique stop: the Idaho Potato Museum. The museum celebrated Idaho's agricultural legacy, giving a nod to the state's most iconic crop.

At the Idaho Falls Idaho Temple and Visitors' Center, Elder



Local guides LaMar Merrill (back, left) and Spencer Rich (front, second from right) led a tour of the Bear Lake Stake Tabernacle and gathered at the Charles C. Rich monument. Photo by Richard B. Crookston.



State Senator C. Scott Grow leads faculty on a tour of the Idaho State Capitol. Photo by Richard B. Crookston.

John H. Groberg, emeritus General Authority Seventy, shared personal insights on Pacific missionary work, temple history, and his service as temple president. Maclane Heward supplemented with reflections on the temple's construction and impact. Mary Jane Woodger shared details about Gutzom Borglum's early Church upbringing and his landmark sculptures. The day concluded with an endowment session in the Rexburg Idaho Temple. (The Teton River Idaho Temple is being built three miles north on the same road. Both will serve the Saints of the Upper Snake River Valley.)

Thursday, July 31—Sugar City: Tragedy and Triumph

Thursday began with a visit to Thomas C. Neibaur Veterans Park in Sugar City, where Brian Mead discussed Neibaur's valor in WWI, resulting in his being the first Latter-day Saint to be awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor. From there, Roger Wiblin guided a

sobering tour of the Teton Dam, site of one of the darkest chapters in Idaho's modern history, when the catastrophic dam failure in June 1972 flooded entire communities. The site served as a powerful reminder of both human vulnerability and resilience.

Friday, August 1—Rexburg to Boise: Memory and Monument
 Back in Rexburg, the group convened with BYU-Idaho Religious Education faculty to discuss shared educational goals. Jake Romney presented on BYU-Pathway Worldwide, emphasizing the Church's global educational outreach. John Thomas and university archivist Adam Luke highlighted the legacy of Thomas E. Ricks, a local foundational educational figure.

Documentary film director Christian Mawlam and producer Fred Woods led a discussion of their documentary *Flood of Memories* at Rexburg's downtown Romance Theater that provided firsthand survivor accounts of the Teton Dam

flood, contextualizing the previous day's site visit.

En route to Boise, the group then drove to Goodale's Cutoff on the old Oregon Trail Route (Highway 20) and visited the dramatic lava fields of Craters of the Moon National Monument.

Saturday, August 2—Boise: Capitol, Conviction, and Community

In Boise, Angie Davis of the Idaho State Archives shared documents related to Latter-day Saints in Idaho, and David Leroy, a former Idaho state attorney general, lieutenant governor, and Abraham Lincoln artifact collector, gave an in-depth presentation on Lincoln's legacy in the creation of the Idaho Territory and on early Idaho governance. Fred Woods presented on the forty-eight Latter-day Saint men incarcerated at the Old Idaho State Penitentiary between 1885 and 1890 for unlawful cohabitation. The group then toured the historic prison.

Stephen W. Kenyon, president of the Boise East Stake and formerly the clerk of the Idaho Supreme Court, discussed the political legacy of Peter Pefley, a member of Idaho's Constitutional Convention who refused to sign the Constitution because of the Idaho Test Oath that disenfranchised the Latter-day Saints from voting.

At the Idaho State Capitol, State Senator C. Scott Grow, an emeritus General Authority Seventy, offered a tour and discussed the current state of Idaho politics and the integration of Latter-day Saint values in public life. The group then visited the Boise homesites of Presidents Howard W. Hunter and Ezra Taft Benson, tracing

the roots of two influential Church Presidents.

Sunday, August 3—Sacred Spaces and Final Reflections

The tour concluded at the Boise Idaho Temple, where Derek Sainsbury offered reflections on the religious dynamics of the Latter-day Saints in the Boise area and where Philip Allred discussed the spiritual legacy of William M. and Orissa Allred, early settlers in St. Charles.

The 2025 Idaho Regional Studies in Church History Tour revealed that history lives not just in dusty books or museum cases but in the land itself—in rivers and valleys, farms and communities, schools

and churches—and most of all in the day-to-day lives of its people. From the vastly different perspectives of the many different types of people, religions, and cultures who call Idaho home, the participants gained a fuller understanding of Idaho's complex and sacred past.

This weeklong pilgrimage of learning and remembrance brought scholars into deeper contact with the region's layered heritage, reminding them—and all of us—that history is never far from where we stand. ☰

Regional Studies in Church History Tours

The journey blended spiritual insight, scholarly discussion, and historical reflection as participants visited cemeteries, homes, monuments, museums, sacred edifices, and historic buildings and landmarks.



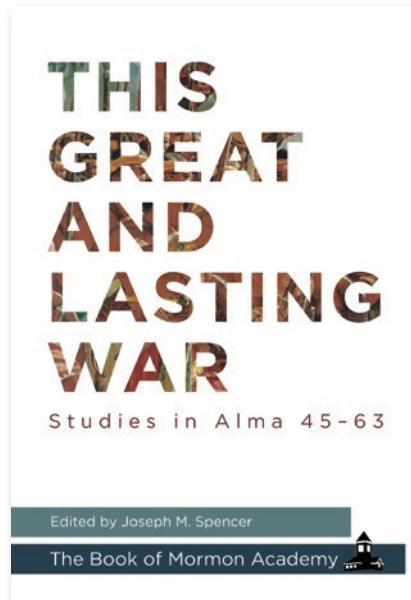
David Leroy, attorney and former lieutenant governor of Idaho, donated a vast array of priceless Lincoln artifacts to the Idaho State Archives. Photo by Richard B. Crookston.

1985	New England
1986	Arizona
1987	British Isles
1988	New York
1989	Ohio
1991	Missouri
1993	Illinois
1996	California
1998	Western Canada
1999	New York and Pennsylvania
2000	Europe
2002	New England
2004	Ohio and Upper Canada
2006	20th-Century Great Britain
2008	Pacific Isles
2010	Salt Lake City
2012	Mormon Trail
2019	Washington, DC
2025	Idaho

This Great and Lasting War: Studies in Alma 45–63

By Emma Clark

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



READERS OF THE BOOK OF MORMON often encounter difficulty in two specific sections: the Isaiah chapters found in 2 Nephi and the so-called war chapters, comprising Alma 45–63. These challenging passages, while commonly associated with reader disengagement, seem to slow readers down for opposite reasons.

While the Isaiah chapters are clearly doctrinally and spiritually rich, interpreting their deeper meanings

can be demanding. In contrast, the war chapters are accessible and narrative-driven, but the challenge comes in understanding their relevance in the greater context of a sacred text. Augmenting personal study with scholarly research and commentary can greatly enrich readers' understanding of these tricky sections of the Book of Mormon. In one of the Religious Studies Center's latest offerings, *This Great and Lasting War*, scholars from Brigham Young University's Book of Mormon Academy focus on Alma 45–63 with hopes to help readers navigate the context and significance of these well-known stories.

Alma 45–63 details the accounts of contention and warfare between the Nephites and the Lamanites. The cunning of Amalickiah, the fight for political power, the foresight of inspired leaders, and the famous title of liberty all play a role in the story of righteousness versus wickedness.

Some readers of the Book of Mormon attempt to use devotional frameworks and metaphors to glean insight from these military accounts,

but a deeper analysis of the text reveals that such interpretive leaps might not be necessary to glimpse Mormon's intention in including these stories. The war chapters possess their own inherent theological, ethical, and literary depth. These seemingly one-dimensional battle stories are much more complex than often assumed, focusing on covenant relationships, the love of God, and human identity. The record draws attention to challenges uniquely faced by women, the struggle of navigating complicated relationships, and the need to make good choices. Within these chapters readers can find the

The cunning of Amalickiah, the fight for political power, the foresight of inspired leaders, and the famous title of liberty all play a role in the story of righteousness versus wickedness.

meaning of scripture in different contexts, the intervening role of a prophet on behalf of the downtrodden, and hope for God's future interventions in the world, as well as what it means to see God in the concrete details of life.

notes the parallels between Captain Moroni and Old Testament prophets, and acknowledges the Book of Mormon use of the Pauline words “stand[ing] fast . . . in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free” (Galatians 5:1).

of divine love that endures violence, and testifies of the significance of covenants in the lives of those engaged in conflict.

Each essay in this volume combines scholarly reasoning and evidence with a perspective of faith to

While theological discourse often emphasizes a broad, eternal perspective of God, these chapters invite readers to perceive the divine amid conflict, hardship, and uncertainty.

While theological discourse often emphasizes a broad, eternal perspective of God, these chapters invite readers to perceive the divine amid conflict, hardship, and uncertainty. *This Great and Lasting War* offers readers of the Book of Mormon well-researched, scholarly perspectives on how to do just that. This volume presents fresh takes on the war chapters from ten scholars whose expertise draws out valuable insights to be learned in Alma 45–63.

The volume is divided into three parts. The first places the Amalickiahite wars into the greater context of Nephite history and related scripture. It highlights the intersection of the spiritual and the mundane throughout the wars, considers the significance of Alma's final prophecy,

The second part narrows its focus to specific episodes within Alma 45–63, using literary analysis to uncover doctrinal insights. It shows how carefully Mormon relates the cautionary story of “the great wickedness one very wicked man can cause to take place among the children of men” (Alma 46:9), offers perspectives of interpretation regarding Captain Moroni's emphatic correspondence with the chief judge Pahoran, and examines the often-overlooked story of the maid servant of Morianton.

The third and final part of the volume explores moral questions that arise across these chapters. It analyzes the Book of Mormon's treatment of complex questions of justice through a study of the word *cause*, supports Mormon's testimony

aid Book of Mormon readers in their thoughtful study. “We find among these chapters much more than war,” notes volume editor Joseph M. Spencer in affirming the value of this volume. “Indeed, we share among us a witness of the truth of the Book of Mormon, and therefore of its worthiness for every effort we can give to studying it more closely. And we share among us a conviction that these chapters in particular—in all their richness and complexity, positively saturated with relevance—point us toward the love of God in sending a Savior to reach us in all our infirmities and conflicts.” ☀

BYU RELIGIOUS EDUCATION
BEACONS OF LIGHT:

150
YEARS OF INSPIRING FAITH AND DISCIPLESHIP

BY TYLER GRIFFIN

TYLER GRIFFIN (*tyler_griffin@byu.edu*) IS AN ASSOCIATE DEAN
OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION AT BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY.



Interior of the present Joseph Smith Building with striking 150-year celebration display. Photo by Marcia Davis.

AS WE COMMEMORATE BYU'S LEGACY OF THE PAST 150 years, we celebrate more than just an institution; we honor a vision. Religious Education at BYU is at the heart of that vision—a beacon of light illuminating the path of discipleship, intellectual expansion, and lifelong learning and service. From humble beginnings within a frontier academy to a global influence shaping millions, BYU Religious Education embodies and exemplifies the university's sacred mission to "assist individuals in their quest for perfection and eternal life."¹

Since its inception, Brigham Young University has stood as a unique institution—one where faith and intellect are harmonized, where spiritual and academic pursuits are paired aspirations. In preparation for its sesquicentennial, every unit on campus was asked to explore ways it has been a beacon of light to the world over the past 150 years. Richard O. Cowan's book *Teaching the Word: Religious Education at Brigham Young University*² provides an excellent overview of our history from its beginnings up through 2008. Much of what follows here is a summary of many highlights found in Brother Cowan's book.

SPIRITUAL BEGINNINGS: THE FOUNDATION OF FAITH

From its earliest days, religious instruction at BYU has been core and foundational, not a tangential afterthought. The original deed of trust was administered to the Brigham Young Academy in 1875 with the directive that every student be instructed in every subject common to any academy of learning in that day. The deed went one step further, however, by including the injunction that “the Old and New Testament, the Book of Mormon and the Book of Doctrine and Covenants shall be read and their doctrines inculcated in the Academy.”³ Karl G. Maeser, the academy’s first principal and one of its most influential early leaders, declared that the school would never teach anything that conflicted with the revelations of God. Those religious education roots were maintained and strengthened throughout the early years of the academy. James E. Talmage was teaching classes at the academy in 1879 when he said, “All our conduct in this academy, of teachers as well as students, all our discipline, all our studies are conducted according to the spirit of the living God.”⁴

The early years were not without their challenges. In 1911 President Joseph F. Smith advised all teachers at BYU to avoid teaching anything that could prove misleading or undermine faith in the students. This direction was reflected in the 1912–13 course catalog, which overtly outlined the purpose of theological courses as being based in scripture. This would promote theoretical understanding and practical application of gospel principles rooted in latter-day revelation so “students may have faith in God and develop a religious character.”⁵

A BRIEF OVERVIEW FROM 1920 TO 2000

From 1875 through 1930, *all* BYU faculty members taught religion classes in addition to courses in their own areas of specialty. In 1930 Guy C. Wilson, who had started the Church’s first seminary at Granite High School in 1912, became the first full-time religion teacher hired at BYU. He was soon joined by others, including Sidney B. Sperry in 1932 and J. Wyley Sessions in 1939. Brother Sessions had started the first Institute of Religion program for the Church in 1926 and then directed similar institute programs at other universities before moving to Provo.

BYU RELIGIOUS EDUCATION A BEACON OF LIGHT



To be a teacher of Jesus Christ’s gospel means to help others understand and rely on His teachings, redeeming power, and perfect love.

—Teaching in the Savior’s Way,
Help Learners Come unto Jesus Christ

Religious Education faculty, 1930–1991.

In 1940 the newly formed Division of Religion, directed by Brother Sessions, created four departments, each with a chairman: Bible and Modern Scripture, Theology and Religious Philosophy, Church History, and Church Organization. This organizational change coincided with the construction of the original Joseph Smith Building (JSB) on campus. In the 1940s the JSB functioned much like an institute program with dances, stage productions, activities, and even a dining program that would later move to the top floor of the Wilkinson Center.

In 1947 Sidney B. Sperry was appointed as the first director of Religious Instruction. This renaming shifted the focus entirely on teaching and scholarship as social and cultural activities were eliminated from the purview of the college. Brother Sperry was the first to take a

lecture series to other parts of Utah and to Idaho, Nevada, California, Washington, and Alberta, thus laying the groundwork for future Know Your Religion and Education Week offerings. In 1953 he led the first BYU Travel Study tour to the Holy Land. During one eleven-year period, religion faculty numbers increased more than sevenfold (from four in 1947 to twenty-nine in 1957), scripture courses significantly expanded, and PhD programs in religion were established.

“All our conduct in this academy, of teachers as well as students, all our discipline, all our studies are conducted according to the spirit of the living God.”

—James E. Talmage

In 1959 the Board of Trustees changed the name from Division of Religion to College of Religious Instruction, with David H. Yarn Jr. being appointed as the first dean. The four departments were expanded into five: Biblical Language, Bible and Modern Scripture, History and Philosophy of Religion, LDS Theology, Church Organization and Administration, and Religious Education.

In the early 1960s the long-standing practice of allowing students to fulfill religion requirements by taking religious-themed classes in other departments was discontinued. This adjustment increased the number of students enrolled in traditional religion classes. The Book of Mormon was established as the basic required course for all freshmen around this time.

During the four years of Dean B. West Belnap's tenure, the religion faculty increased from thirty-one to forty-one. His successor, Dean Daniel H. Ludlow, was highly trusted by the General Authorities and was instrumental in providing course reductions to allow the religion faculty to create Church curriculum and activities that would be used across the world for the next twenty-five years. In 1965 Dean Ludlow became one of the first educators in the country to use the television to deliver lectures.

From 1963 to 1969, the college had simplified its structure into two departments, one for undergraduate education and one for graduate education. By 1969 there was a feeling that specialties would be beneficial for scheduling and collaboration, so three new departments were established: Ancient Scripture, Church History and Doctrine, and Philosophy.

Since 1940 the Board of Trustees had required that students take two credits of religion every semester they attended classes, adding up to sixteen completed religion credits come graduation. In 1972, during Dean Roy W. Doxey's tenure, the Board reduced that requirement to fourteen credits, and it has remained there ever since. Also in that year, the Board voted to discontinue granting doctoral degrees. With that adjustment, the Department of Philosophy was moved to the College of General Studies. The president of BYU at that time, Dallin H. Oaks, shortened the name of the College of Religious Instruction to Religious Instruction to signal that the religious education of students was central to the mission of the university, and he expected that every teacher on campus should be able to teach a religion class if called upon to do so. This became known as the “transfer faculty program.” The Sidney B. Sperry Symposium was established in 1973 to increase the impact of Religious Instruction beyond the campus.

In 1974 Jeffrey R. Holland became the new dean at the age of thirty-three. Dean Holland increased the number of transfer faculty from thirty-five to eighty-five. To help build collegiality and foster more discussion among the religion faculty, Dean Holland started a Friday “Brown Bag Seminar” where teachers would take turns leading gospel discussions, sharing teaching ideas, and receiving feedback

on their research. To provide additional opportunities for religion faculty to publish their research, Dean Holland started the Religious Studies Center (RSC) on campus in 1975 and served as its first director.

When Dean Holland was named as the Commissioner of Education for the Church in 1976, Ellis T. Rasmussen was appointed as the new dean. He helped develop stronger curricular connections with Seminaries and Institutes. Under his leadership, Susan Easton Black was hired into a full-time position in Religious Instruction, becoming its first female faculty member.

Robert J. Matthews served as the dean from 1981 to 1990. In 1983 Religious Instruction underwent another name change, becoming Religious Education. During Dean Matthew's tenure, greater emphasis was placed on scholarship and writing. The roles of two associate deans were established with one overseeing curriculum and teaching duties and the other directing the work of faculty research and publications. In 1985 the religion-core requirement was adjusted to include two Book of Mormon classes, one New Testament class, and one Doctrine and Covenants class. The new Joseph Smith Building was dedicated in 1991 by President Gordon B. Hinckley.

Robert L. Millet served as the dean from 1991 to 2000. When he was introduced to the faculty as the new dean, Elders Neal A. Maxwell, Dallin H. Oaks, and Boyd K. Packer all attended. They charged Dean Millet to find new ways to bless the Church and the whole world through the work at BYU.

In 1997 Keith Perkins created an independent study course that became one of the first Internet-based courses in the nation. Dean Millet helped reinstitute the master's degree program in Religious Education. He also initiated the *Religious Educator* journal at the RSC. Richard N. Holzapfel served as the journal's first editor in chief.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION FROM 2000 TO THE PRESENT

From 2000 to 2025, Religious Education has had five deans: Andrew Skinner (2000–5), Terry Ball (2006–13), Brent Top (2013–18), Daniel Judd (2018–21), and Scott Esplin (2021–present). During these years, BYU Religious Education has seen many changes and improvements in

our ability to be a beacon of light to the world. Some of those efforts include the following:

There has been an increase in academic publishing as well as gospel scholarship being produced. The RSC hired Devan Jensen as executive editor in 2001, a move that helped to triple the RSC's output. Editors Don Brugger, Shirley Ricks, Becky Call, and others helped improve the quantity and quality of publications.

Faculty members have served on the Church's Gospel Topics projects, contributed to The Joseph Smith Papers, and provided expertise in curriculum development and correlation review for the Church's educational and messaging efforts.

Three new symposia were started to meet different needs: the Church History Symposium, the Student Symposium, and the Easter Conference.

Religious Education has also played a key role in supporting Church initiatives. Faculty members have served on the Church's Gospel Topics projects, contributed to *The Joseph Smith Papers*, and provided expertise in curriculum development and correlation review for the Church's educational and messaging efforts.

The chaplaincy program was started, and the master of religious education program was expanded.

The religion-core requirements changed for all CES entities. Students are now required to complete four cornerstone courses along with three elective classes. The cornerstones are The Eternal Family, Foundations of the

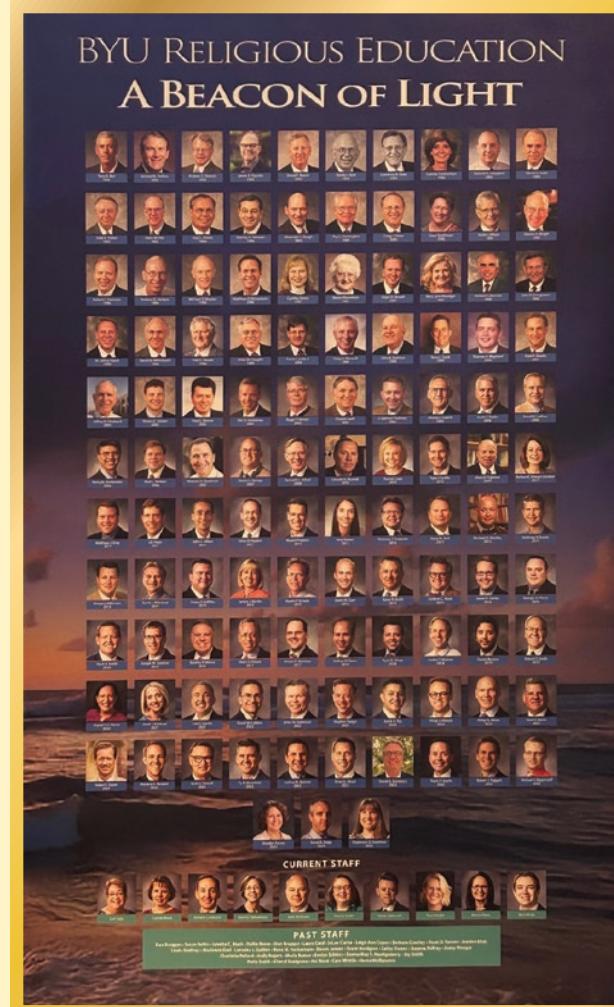
Restoration, Jesus Christ and His Everlasting Gospel, and Teachings and Doctrines of the Book of Mormon. In 2019 the Board of Trustees approved a guiding document called “Strengthening Religious Education in Institutions of Higher Education” (SRE). This document provides a purpose statement and framework for all universities within CES. It has become a major foundation for our teaching, research, hiring, promotion, and citizenship work.

We developed significant remote and online teaching capabilities due to the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic. Technological innovation has also played a role. With the rising tide of online education and digital media, BYU faculty have been at the forefront of creating content that reaches millions of people beyond campus. From podcasts and YouTube videos to virtual courses and scripture apps, Religious Education has helped bring gospel learning to a global audience.

We have seen an increase in experiential learning opportunities for students. This has come in various forms such as travel study experiences being offered to more students, archaeological digs, interfaith dialogues, service learning opportunities, animation and visualization projects, and options for more students to work on self-selected creative projects as part of their grades.

The past few years have also seen significant relationships being built with our sister institutions within the Church Educational System (CES). The Commissioner's office set up a religious educators committee to meet three times per year. This committee is composed of administrators from Seminaries and Institutes (S&I), BYU, BYU-Idaho, BYU-Hawaii, and Ensign College. This committee reinstated the CES Conference for Religious Educators, which has now been held for the past two years.⁶ Through these relationships, we have also participated in more meaningful interfaculty exchanges and interactions with BYU-Idaho and S&I. We have also started new podcast initiatives here that involve other teachers, administrators, and students within the CES family.

BYU Religious Education also worked to create a new motto for use in messaging and publicity efforts. The new



Religious Education faculty, 1992–2025.

motto is “Inspiring all to come unto Christ through study and faith.”

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION AS CORE TO BYU'S MISSION

Moving forward, our efforts to be a beacon of light to the world are shaped by the SRE document, which clearly defines our role and purpose as follows:

Religious education holds a unique and cherished place in the mission of [BYU]. It stands at the very center of [BYU's] purpose.

In CES institutions every class in every subject should be taught with the Spirit of God by faculty who bathe their subjects in the light

of the gospel and who are role models of faithful discipleship. What gives religious education its distinctive character is its focus on teaching the restored gospel of Jesus Christ directly and devotedly.

Religious education has a critical role to play in strengthening the faith and deepening the conversion of CES students.⁷

Today, the Religious Education faculty includes gifted teachers and accomplished scholars in scripture, Church history, ancient languages, world religions, and doctrinal subjects. These professors have a dual commitment to faith and reason.

Religious Education at BYU is intentionally student-focused. Faculty members frequently mentor students, facilitate active learning and service learning, and model discipleship in their personal and professional lives. We strive to make our religion classes safe places for students to ask questions, explore doctrines, and deepen their relationship with God.

SHAPING DISCIPLES AND LEADERS

Perhaps the most significant beacon of light emanating from Religious Education at BYU is its students. For 150 years, graduates have gone on to become missionaries, parents, Church leaders, educators, and civic contributors who carry with them a foundation of faith rooted in their BYU experience.

BYU Religious Education teaches not only doctrine but discipleship. Students learn how to live the gospel, not just understand it intellectually. They are invited to make and keep sacred covenants, serve others, and develop Christlike attributes. In a world increasingly marked by confusion and relativism, BYU offers clarity, conviction, and compassion.

Many alumni recount their religion classes as among the most influential of their college years. Professors often become lifelong mentors. Testimonies are deepened, questions are wrestled with honestly, and students leave more prepared to be faithful, thoughtful Latter-day Saints in an ever-changing world.

BYU RELIGIOUS EDUCATION TIMELINE 1875–2025

1875 Brigham Young Academy founded; deed requires scripture-based instruction.	1879 James E. Talmage teaches at the Academy.	1911 President Joseph F. Smith counsels teachers to avoid undermining faith.	1930 Guy C. Wilson hired as first full-time religion teacher.	1940 Division of Religion formed; four departments created.	1941 Original Joseph Smith Building dedicated.
1973 Sidney B. Sperry Symposium established.	1974–75 Jeffrey R. Holland becomes dean; founds Religious Studies Center (RSC).	1985 Name changed to Religious Education; religion-core requirement updated with Book of Mormon, New Testament, and Doctrine and Covenants classes.	1991 New Joseph Smith Building dedicated.	1997 First Internet-based religion course at BYU launched.	2006 Church History Symposium established.

LOOKING FORWARD: THE NEXT 150 YEARS

As BYU enters its next chapter, Religious Education remains central to the university's identity and mission. In a time when faith is often challenged and moral anchors questioned, the need for a spiritually rooted, intellectually vibrant education is greater than ever. Religious Education at BYU stands ready to meet that need.

New generations of students will continue to be taught by consecrated teachers who blend academic excellence with spiritual power. Innovations in teaching and learning will expand the reach of the gospel message. Scholarship will continue to strengthen testimonies, support Church initiatives, and build bridges with the broader world.

In every way, BYU Religious Education embodies the university's prophetic destiny to be a beacon of light to the world. It is not merely a campus unit; it is a mission. It is not simply about credit hours; it is about conversion. Religious Education has been at the heart of BYU's mission from the very beginning and has guided generations of students, scholars, and truth seekers and will continue to serve as a beacon of light to all the world. ☀

BYU | 150

NOTES

1. "Mission of the University," aims.byu.edu.
2. Richard O. Cowan, *Teaching the Word: Religious Education at Brigham Young University* (Religious Studies Center, 2008), <https://rsc.byu.edu/book/teaching-word>.
3. Deed of Trust, quoted in John P. Fugal, "University-Wide Religious Objectives: Their History and Implementation at Brigham Young University" (PhD diss., Brigham Young University, 1967), 36.
4. "Theological References," October 13, 1879, book 2, p. 9, University Archives, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, BYU.
5. *Annual Catalogue*, 1912, 82, published in *Brigham Young University Quarterly* 7, no. 4 (May 1, 1912).
6. <https://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/event/religious-educators-06-2025>.
7. "Strengthening Religious Education in Institutions of Higher Education" (Church Educational System, 2019), 1.

1947	1953	1959	1965	1969	1972
Sidney B. Sperry appointed first director of Religious Instruction.	First BYU Travel Study tour to the Holy Land.	Division renamed College of Religious Instruction.	Dean Daniel H. Ludlow pioneers televised lectures.	Departments reorganized into Ancient Scripture, Church History and Doctrine, and Philosophy.	Religion requirement reduced to 14 credits; PhD program discontinued.
2008	2015	2019	2020	2024	2025
Graduate-level chaplaincy program established.	BYU's Board of Trustees announces a new Religious Education curriculum with four cornerstone courses plus electives.	Board of Trustees approves "Strengthening Religious Education" (SRE) document.	Religion classes pivot to remote instruction due to COVID-19 pandemic.	RSC becomes part of BYU Religious Scholarly Publications.	150th anniversary of BYU.

The *Religious Educator*— A Quarter Century of Refinement

By Leigh Ann Copas

LEIGH ANN COPAS (leighann_copas@byu.edu) IS THE PUBLICATIONS COORDINATOR FOR THE RELIGIOUS STUDIES CENTER AT BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY.

AS THE *RELIGIOUS EDUCATOR*: *Perspectives on the Restored Gospel* marks its twenty-fifth anniversary—a milestone traditionally celebrated with silver—it stands as a testament to the enduring value of thoughtful, faithful scholarship. From its modest beginnings in 2000 with a single issue, the journal has grown into a respected academic publication appearing three times annually.¹

This silver anniversary celebration invites reflection not only on the journal's legacy but on its connection to the symbolic presence of silver in the scriptures. In Malachi 3:1–3 we observe that the refining of silver is a powerful metaphor for spiritual preparation and purification:

Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the Lord of hosts.

But who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he

appeareth? for he is like a refiner's fire, and like fullers' soap:

And he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver: and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness.

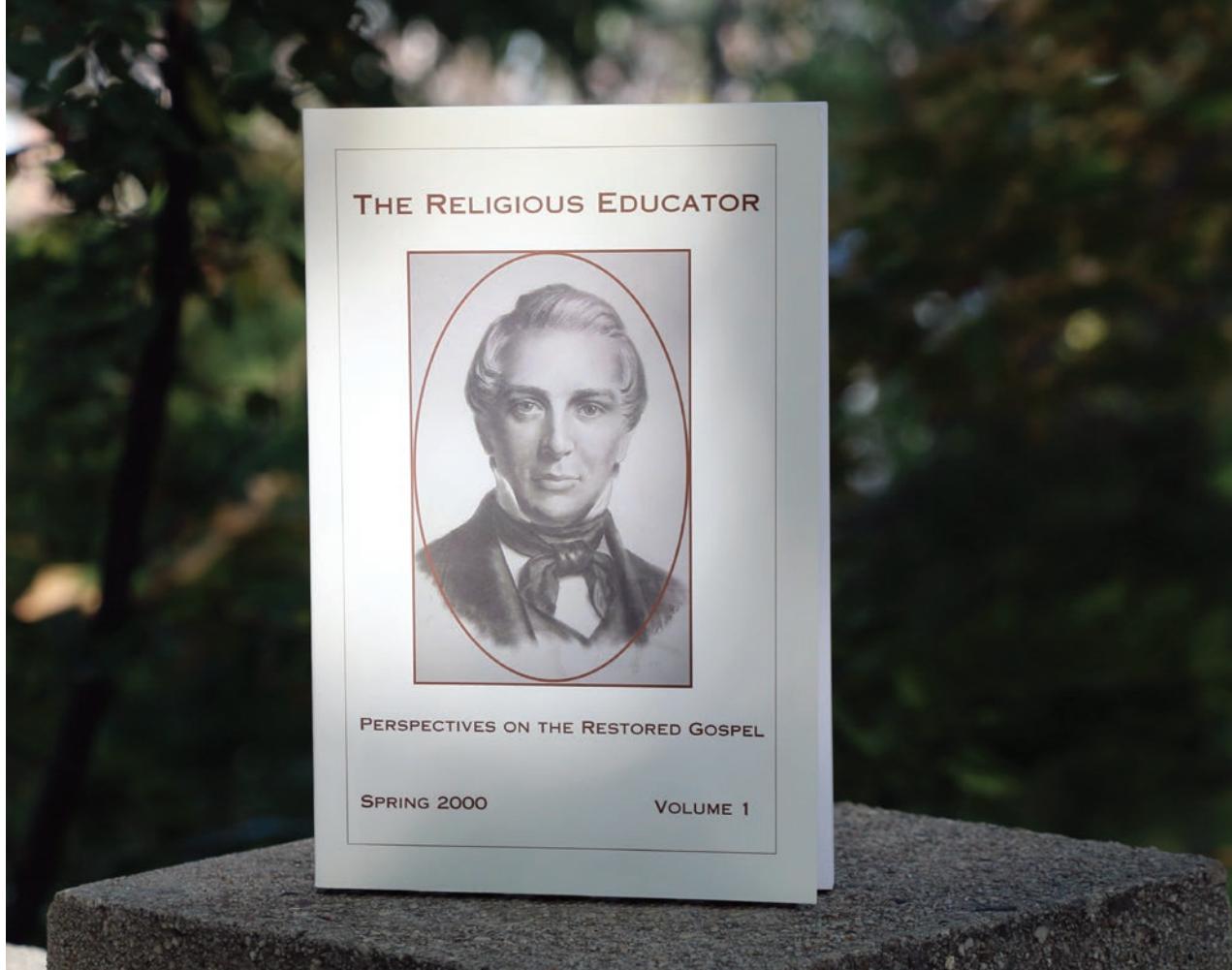
Just as silver is refined through fire to remove impurities, the *Religious Educator* has served as a crucible for refining gospel understanding. Submissions initially focused on three criteria—gospel teaching, doctrinal understanding, and Church history, topics often covered by BYU scholars—but have grown to include remarks from Apostles and other General Authorities and General Officers of the Church, along with presenting insight and expertise from seminary and institute teachers. Through careful scholarship and inspired teaching, the *Religious Educator* has helped purify and elevate the spiritual offerings of educators and learners alike.

A Flame of Inspired Instruction

Gospel teaching is the spark that ignites spiritual transformation, refining both teachers and learners as they read and apply messages found in the *Religious Educator*. Over the last twenty-five years, editors in chief have consistently championed articles focused on inspired instruction, offering educators tools to teach with clarity, conviction, and compassion. In the journal's pages, readers have encountered practical strategies, pedagogical insights, and spiritual encouragement that elevate the act of teaching.

For example, in “Teaching the Four Gospels: Five Considerations,” professor of ancient scripture Gaye Strathearn provides educators with a framework for approaching the New Testament with greater depth and sensitivity. Her guidance on genre, interpretation, and Restoration scripture helps teachers refine their understanding and better convey the life and teachings of Christ.

Similarly, in “Attributes and Approaches of Effective Gospel Teachers,” BYU alumnus Kendel Christensen and professor of Church history and doctrine Lloyd D. Newell



The first issue of the *Religious Educator*. Photo by Bekah Black.

Just as silver is purified through repeated refinement, doctrinal understanding is clarified through careful, faithful scholarship.

explore the qualities that distinguish spiritually impactful educators. They emphasize preparation, empathy, and adaptability—all of which are traits that transform teaching into a sanctifying experience for both the instructor and students.

Finally, “The Word Made Flesh: Teaching the Gospel Concretely,” by professor of ancient scripture Stephan Taeger, invites educators to present gospel principles in tangible and relatable ways. This approach helps learners internalize eternal truths and apply them in meaningful

ways to their lives. These approaches echo the refining of silver by making abstract doctrine accessible and actionable for learners.

Purifying Truth Through Scholarship

Just as silver is purified through repeated refinement, doctrinal understanding is clarified through careful, faithful scholarship. In the *Religious Educator*, authors help readers examine, articulate, and deepen connections to gospel truths. Throughout his article

“Understanding and Teaching Correct Doctrine Correctly,” J. Jarlath Brophy emphasizes the importance of doctrinal accuracy in classroom settings and cautions against misinterpretation. He calls teachers to align their lessons with the words of living prophets.

Additionally, Religious Education professors Anthony Sweat, Michael Hubbard MacKay, and Gerrit J. Dirkmaat offer a framework for distinguishing between core, supportive, policy, and esoteric teachings in their article “Doctrine: Models to Evaluate Types and Sources of Latter-day Saint Teachings.” These models help gospel teachers navigate doctrinal complexities with confidence and care, thus ensuring that what is taught is both accurate and contextualized appropriately for the lesson and students.

Preserving Our Precious Legacy

Silver gains value through craftsmanship and preservation, and likewise Church history enriches gospel understanding by connecting the past to the present. Editors of the *Religious*

Educator have consistently treated historical inquiry as a sacred endeavor—one that refines faith, deepens perspective, and strengthens testimony. By presenting well-researched articles and thoughtful analysis in each issue, editors have showcased messages

that aid educators and learners in appreciating the spiritual significance of historical context. Elder Bruce R. McConkie once asked, “What histories shall we believe where Mormon history is concerned?” In their article “A Method for Evaluating Latter-day



The fiftieth anniversary issue of the *Religious Educator*. Photo by Bekah Black.

Saint History,” professors of Church history and doctrine Anthony Sweat and Kenneth Alford outline five criteria for answering Elder McConkie’s question and assessing the reliability of historical claims:

- Is it a primary account?
- What is its relationship to other sources?
- Is it a contemporary account?
- Does it have an objective perspective?
- Are its claims supported by evidence?

Such an approach helps educators and students navigate the complexities of Church history with discernment, embrace faith-promoting scholarship, avoid sensationalism, and reduce the spreading of false information.

The Growth of Seminary and Institute Contributions

From its earliest volumes, the *Religious Educator* has welcomed voices from seminary and institute educators, recognizing their frontline role in gospel instruction. Interest from S&I teachers not only helped drive early subscriptions, but their contributions quickly became a vital part of the journal’s identity.

What began as individual submissions from S&I instructors evolved into a dedicated yearly issue. Recent issues have addressed modern challenges such as integrating *Come, Follow Me* with Life Preparation lessons, using empathy to teach difficult scripture passages, and

Like silver purified seven times, the Religious Educator continues to shine with increasing brilliance—reflecting the light of truth and the refining power of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ.

navigating the role of artificial intelligence in religious education. These articles demonstrate the journal’s responsiveness to the evolving needs of gospel teachers and its role in refining instruction for a changing world.

A landmark moment in this evolution was including the proceedings from the Church Educational System Religious Educators Conference held on June 19, 2024. This historical event brought together religious educators from across CES, including Seminaries and Institutes, BYU, BYU-Idaho, BYU-Hawaii, Ensign College, and BYU-Pathway Worldwide. Together, these educators serve nearly half a million young adults across the Church. As Elder Clark G. Gilbert noted, this was the first time CES educators had assembled collectively to share insights and strengthen their teaching efforts.² This significant development occurred under the direction of associate publications director Michael A. Goodman, who has served as editor in chief since 2021.

In this way, the *Religious Educator* serves as a forge where gospel teachers are shaped and strengthened. Their offerings, once comparatively raw and unformed, become polished and purposeful, ready to bless others with light and truth.

Shining Forward

The prophet David declared, “The words of the Lord are pure words: as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times” (Psalm 12:6). These themes resonate deeply with the mission of the *Religious Educator*. Each article, insight, lesson, and testimony shared within its pages contributes to the sanctifying work of gospel education—helping readers become more spiritually attuned, doctrinally grounded, and Christlike in their teaching and living.

Like silver purified seven times, the *Religious Educator* continues to shine with increasing brilliance—reflecting the light of truth and the refining power of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ. Its legacy is not only in the scholarship it preserves, but also in the lives it shapes and the faith it strengthens. ☀

Notes

1. For a detailed history of the journal, see Brad Wilcox and Timothy G. Morrison, “Twenty Years of the Religious Educator,” *Religious Educator* 21, no. 1 (2020): 13–29.
2. Rachel Sterzer Gibson, “How Church Education Is a ‘Sleeping Giant in the Church,’” <https://www.thechurchnews.com/living-faith/2024/06/19/2024-religious-educators-conference-ces-elder-clark-g-gilbert-chad-webb/>.

NUMBERING, NAMING, AND NOURISHING IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

By Scott C. Esplin

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

REGARDING THE ORGANIZATION of the Church among the followers of Christ in the Book of Mormon, the prophet Moroni observed, “After they had been received unto baptism, and were wrought upon and cleansed by the power of the Holy Ghost, they were numbered among the people of the church of Christ; and their names were taken, that they might be remembered and nourished by the good word of God” (Moroni 6:4). Following this scriptural pattern, in Religious Education we have been carefully considering the numbering, naming, and nourishing of our students, especially those in our largest classes.

In Religious Education we teach approximately 25,000 undergraduate students each fall and winter semester.¹ To do so, Brigham Young University has two long-established tracks for its faculty. The most common is the professorial track, in which “faculty members are expected to engage in high-quality teaching, scholarship, and citizenship, including mentoring of students.”² In Religious Education, the professional



Jenet Erickson teaches *The Eternal Family*. Photo by Richard B. Crookston.

track has similar expectations for high-quality teaching, citizenship, and student mentoring. However, in place of the expectation to produce scholarship, those in this track have a specialized assignment to carry larger class loads and to teach larger classes. As a result, professional track faculty members have taught as many as six sections each during fall and winter semesters, often with more than 200 students in each class, in

auditorium-style rooms, for what was often a total of 1,200 students per teacher per semester. Under that configuration, seven faculty in this track had the potential to teach as many as 8,400 students in each semester, or more than 30 percent of our student enrollment.

Recently, when leaders from Religious Education counseled with BYU and Church Educational System leadership, the request was

made to find ways to serve students in smaller class settings. In support of this directive, the university and the Commissioner's office generously increased the number of professional track faculty within Religious Education while charging us to reduce the size of our largest classes—all with the desire that students would be blessed.

With the influx of additional professional track faculty, including three who transferred from BYU-Idaho, four hired in the past two years, and others who will be hired this year, the professional track in Religious Education will more than double in size from 7 to 16 full-time faculty by 2026.³ This expansion has allowed us to allocate these teachers to smaller classrooms on a space-available basis. Beginning in fall 2024, each professional track teacher taught four classes averaging 200 students and two classes averaging 60 students. Student rating scores increased nearly 5 percent in the smaller classes, even for faculty who are among the highest-rated teachers in Religious Education. As space allows, we plan to continue to reduce the size of additional large classes so that students can be more directly numbered, named, and nourished by the good word of God.

Religious Education expects to continue to produce gospel scholarship for Latter-day Saints, academic research for academic audiences, and pedagogical scholarship aimed at improving gospel teaching and learning.⁴ Describing the place of BYU within the Church Educational

System, Elder Clark G. Gilbert, Commissioner of Church Education, emphasized that this university has a scholarship expectation: "BYU is the *educational ambassador* and represents the entire system and the Church in its scholarship, academic programs, and ability to be a light beyond the university."⁵ Given this scholarship expectation for BYU, we expect that the professional track will remain a minority among the nearly 80 faculty who teach full-time in Religious Education. Additionally, through these class-size reductions, we also hope to make it possible for our remarkable teachers to better number, name, and nourish our students.

Through these class-size reductions, we also hope to make it possible for our remarkable teachers to better number, name, and nourish our students.

Ministering to God's children and ensuring that they have a personal experience with the divine is not without scriptural precedent. In his incomparable visit to his followers in the Book of Mormon, the Savior ministered to a multitude of 2,500 men, women, and children "one by one until they had all gone forth, and did see with their eyes and did feel with their hands, and did know of a surety and did bear record, that it was he, of whom it was written by

the prophets, that should come" (3 Nephi 11:15; see 17:25). Ushering in this dispensation, both Heavenly Father and Moroni personalized their encounters with young Joseph Smith, calling him by name (see Joseph Smith—History 1:17, 33).

While the number of students we serve is daunting, we are hoping to also minister to the one and better call each by name in Religious Education to, in the words of Moroni, "keep [our students] in the right way, to keep them continually watchful unto prayer, relying alone upon the merits of Christ, who [is] the author and the finisher of their faith" (Moroni 6:4). 

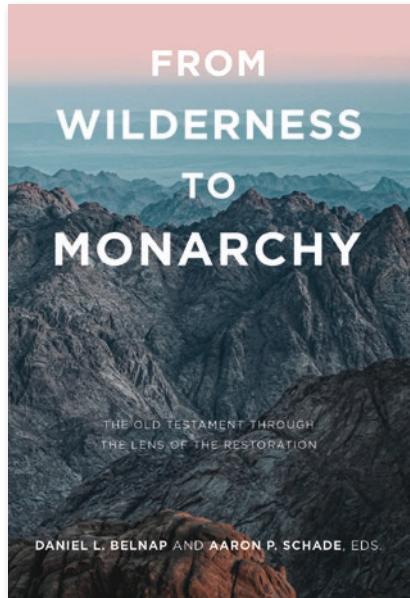
Notes

1. While BYU had a total of 32,823 undergraduate students in fall 2024, not every student takes a religion class every semester, accounting for the discrepancy in numbers between students taught and total enrolled students. Some students opt to take classes during spring or summer terms, double up on religion classes in other semesters, or are on campus longer than four years, thereby spreading out the time between when they take religion classes.
2. "Rank and Status Policy," § 2.2, <https://policy.byu.edu/view/rank-and-status-policy>.
3. In addition to these professional track faculty who have traditionally taught our largest classes, Religious Education is also well served by two professional track faculty with the specialized assignment to teach our smallest classes, those in the Master of Arts Chaplaincy program.
4. "Strengthening Religious Education in Institutions of Higher Education," Church Educational System, June 12, 2019.
5. Clark G. Gilbert, Scott C. Esplin, and Jared W. Ludlow, "Reanchoring Our Purpose to Jesus Christ," *Religious Educator* 23, no. 2 (2022): 13; emphasis in original.

From Wilderness to Monarchy: The Old Testament Through the Lens of the Restoration

By Aaron P. Schade and Daniel L. Belnap

AARON P. SCHADE (aaron_schade@byu.edu) AND DANIEL L. BELNAP (dan_belnap@byu.edu) ARE PROFESSORS OF ANCIENT SCRIPTURE AT BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY.



IN 2021 THE FIRST OF FOUR VOLUMES presenting scholarship on the Old Testament, *From Creation to Sinai: The Old Testament Through the Lens of the Restoration*, was published. Later this year the second volume, *From Wilderness to Monarchy*, will be published, followed by volumes 3 and 4 in the next few years. The idea for the series arose from conversations between the editors, Dan Belnap and Aaron Schade. After numerous

discussions in Sunday School classes and with their university students, family members, friends, and colleagues, the editors felt that Latter-day Saints could benefit from a series of volumes on texts and aspects of the Old Testament from a scholarly and believing perspective—with an emphasis on what apostles, prophets, and modern revelation have added to our understanding of the topics under study.

Since the beginning of the twentieth century, biblical scholarship has engaged in a number of exegetical methodologies to help make sense of the complexities of the Old Testament, and our authors have productively consulted and engaged many of these while working on this volume. Exegetical approaches can be extremely helpful in approaching the texts, but at times some can underutilize scripture and its spiritual value, depending on one's interpretive approach and application of the data. While many approaches do allow for greater understanding of a given text and its place within the larger textual body, various objectives, at times,

can also leave little room for divine revelation and prophetic authority as imperative or legitimate avenues for understanding. Nonetheless, we accept these and many other insights that can be gleaned from different approaches. Knowing how to implement the various conclusions while placing prophetic authority in the highest position was essential and a focus of this volume. We have found it valuable to synthesize the insights from revelation with the best of what academic exegesis can produce. The result is that we can fully engage with the scriptural canon in a way that is meaningful and uplifting and that offers greater clarity to the past, present, and future.

Thanks to the restoration of the priesthood and continuing revelation, the Old Testament patriarchs and prophets are not simply literary models of righteous behavior. They are also living figures who have interacted, and continue to interact, with the Saints in this dispensation. Their stories offer much for modern readers to glean in their individual

pursuits of discipleship. By virtue of their inception via divine authority, the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible, the Book of Mormon, and the Pearl of Great Price allow for certain insights and interpretations to biblical narratives that are not always acceptable to modern exegetical analysis. In our eyes they continue and build on those narratives in ways that may not be possible to authenticate through modern scholarship yet are realities that can be confirmed by faith and revelation. The lens through which these revealed texts situate the Old Testament thus becomes remarkable and illuminating.

The purpose of the series, then, is to provide perspectives using sound academic methodologies while simultaneously drawing on insights gained from prophets, apostles, and Restoration scripture. Like its predecessor, *From Wilderness to Monarchy* addresses what may be less familiar historical elements and difficult concepts that readers could be struggling with. In terms of the biblical texts, this volume covers Joshua, Judges, 1–2 Samuel, and parts of 1 Kings and 1 Chronicles, as well as the poetic texts of Psalms, Proverbs, and the Song of Songs (also known as the Song of Solomon). The title of the book references the periods associated with the Former Prophets (i.e., Joshua through 2 Kings, excluding the book of Ruth) and with King David and King Solomon.

A challenge for this section of the Bible is recognizing the role and voice of a redactor or redactors in the formation of the Old Testament.

For many biblical scholars, the historical texts listed above (often associated with what is known as the Deuteronomistic History, or DtrH) appear to have been reworked or redacted by a person or group strongly influenced by the laws of Deuteronomy and who added commentary through the redaction process, similar to Mormon as he compiled and commented on episodes in the Book of Mormon. This editorial voice seems to have been affected by personal experience either with the rise and fall of Israel and Judah at the hands of the Neo-Assyrians or with the destruction and wholesale captivity of Jerusalem by the Neo-Babylonian Empire. Isolating that commentary from the original narrative can be both difficult and illuminating, and it is not always clear how to interpret the language of exposition in relation to earlier presentations of the texts. This volume attempts to offer some approaches to these issues while maintaining confidence in the Bible and its reliability as the word of God.

For example, on the one hand, the DtrH assessment of the institution of the monarchy (its origin story) described in 1 Samuel 8 (and subsequent descriptions of how the monarchy actually functioned) suggests that the wickedness of Israel's kings became a primary reason why the people of Israel in general had done so poorly in keeping their covenantal obligations with God. On the other hand, there is no question that 1–2 Samuel and 1–2 Kings present those kings as chosen

men of God, at least initially. It was only when they lost the humility and determination to keep God's laws that kingship became a liability. Thus, both perspectives have merit and need not be viewed as contradictory. Both original background and subsequent commentary in relation to it can provide a variety of perspectives that do not invalidate but illuminate the texts.

Understandably, these various perspectives can be simultaneously confusing and enlightening, and we as readers may not always come to understand the original nuances or language of the texts, but we do our best to glean what we can from them. Addressing these nuances within this volume creates an enlightening experience that enhances appreciation for “all that God has revealed, all that He does now reveal, and . . . [all] that He will yet reveal” (Articles of Faith 1:9) through his prophets.

In sum, although the Old Testament is an ancient record, its teachings are still relevant and foundational. For example, the Old Testament theme of rejecting God for the acclaim of the world is one that may resonate with a more contemporary audience. With this efferent value of scripture in mind, the authors of this volume explore the texts and events of the turbulent period when the Israelite nation developed from a wilderness community to a powerful monarchy. ☸

AN EVENING OF CELEBRATION

By Becky Isom Call

BECKY ISOM CALL (*rebecca_call@byu.edu*) IS AN EDITOR AT THE RELIGIOUS STUDIES CENTER.

ON MAY 14, 2025, THE RELIGIOUS Studies Center commemorated its fiftieth anniversary with a gala held at the Hinckley Center, where guests gathered to enjoy good food, great company, and thoughtful messages on the Center's history. In attendance was President Jeffrey R. Holland, founder of the RSC, who expressed gratitude to all who support the Center's mission of advancing gospel scholarship.

He reflected on his eighty-five years of life, including the profound influence of the other members of the Quorum of the Twelve and First Presidency, as well as a life-threatening illness that, in his words, "took me to the edge of eternity." Toward the end of his remarks, he said, "If I could have you feel what I feel about those years, these experiences, and that association, you would run from tonight and you'd grab your pen and pencil and iPad and laptop, and you'd teach and testify and testify and teach—and you'd do it on the run."

Founding

President Holland founded the RSC in 1975 as an avenue for BYU faculty to "write and share their teaching with an ever-widening audience of

students, alumni, and Latter-day Saints generally."¹ He later articulated an even more expansive vision of the Center, that it would be a contributor to global unity and peace in preparation for the Savior's return.²

Today the RSC joins with BYU Studies and the Maxwell Institute under the umbrella of a new unit known as "BYU Religious Scholarly Publications," led by assistant academic vice president Reid Neilson. The Center is housed in the hundred-year-old Heber J. Grant building on the historic Temple Hill of south BYU campus. Day-to-day operations are carried out by a team of eight faculty and staff members, supported by five student employees and interns.

Milestones

From its inception, the RSC has occupied a distinctive place in advancing BYU's mission through scholarship that pairs reason with revelation. And according to publications director Jared Ludlow, the numbers are impressive: In the five decades of its existence, the RSC has worked with 1,275 authors to publish more than four hundred books and seventy-two peer-reviewed issues of the *Religious Educator*. It has



copublished with Deseret Book since 2009 and hosts ongoing religious and academic conferences such as the BYU Religious Education Symposium in Honor of Sidney B. Sperry, the BYU Easter Conference, and the Church History Symposium. Additionally, it publishes the continuing work of the Book of Mormon Academy and *The Brigham Young Journals*.

Executive editor Devan Jensen has worked at the RSC for twenty-four of its fifty years and says that he's seen many changes in that time. He recalls that initially publications were "mainly print based with limited circulation" but that now "the RSC has embraced digital platforms



BYU president C. Shane Reese (left) with President Jeffrey R. Holland (right) at the RSC's celebration dinner. Photo by Richard B. Crookston.

"If I could have you feel what I feel . . . , you would run from tonight and you'd grab your pen and pencil and iPad and laptop, and you'd teach and testify and testify and teach—and you'd do it on the run."

—President Jeffrey R. Holland

(including an enhanced website, podcasts, and YouTube), making its scholarship accessible to a global audience for free.”

Ludlow called the RSC website “one of the gems of Church scholarship,” with “1.85 million active users and 3.6 million page views from virtually every country in the world.”

The Gala

The fiftieth anniversary gala was a meaningful tribute to five decades of impactful work. Alongside President Holland, the evening featured remarks from BYU president C. Shane Reese, assistant academic vice president Reid L. Neilson, Director Ludlow, associate publications director Michael Goodman, emeritus professors Kent Jackson and Camille

Fronk Olson, and dean of Religious Education Scott Esplin.

The event was organized by RSC publications coordinator Leigh Ann Copas, who reflected, “One of the most memorable parts of the evening was hearing the personal reflections shared by each speaker. Their heartfelt stories deeply resonated with many in attendance and reminded us that the mission of the Religious Studies Center is not only intellectually enriching but spiritually essential. Many left the evening feeling inspired and reaffirmed in their commitment to advancing the gospel of Jesus Christ.”

Looking Ahead

Ludlow said, “As we celebrate fifty years of inspired work, we honor the past and look forward with hope and

a commitment to excellence. The RSC’s mission remains clear: to build faith, foster understanding, and share the light of the gospel with the world.”

In that spirit, the RSC welcomes all to support its mission, whether by subscribing, sharing, writing, or submitting. We hope that more and more people will take advantage of this wealth of religious scholarship to supplement their personal gospel study. ☀

Visit us online at rsc.byu.edu and follow us on YouTube @BYURSC.

Notes

1. Jeffrey R. Holland and Thomas A. Wayment, “The RSC Turns Forty: A Conversation with Elder Jeffrey R. Holland,” *Religious Educator* 16, no. 2 (2015): 2.
2. Jeffrey R. Holland, “. . . Of Countries and Kingdoms,” *BYU Studies* 18, no. 1 (1977): 5.



Presenting *Y Religion Presents*

By Anthony Sweat

ANTHONY SWEAT (anthony_sweat@byu.edu) IS CHAIR OF THE DEPARTMENT OF CHURCH HISTORY AND DOCTRINE AT BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY.

IN OCTOBER 2023 JOHN HILTON III and I sat across a table with headphones over our ears and a red recording light on to do a bonus episode for the *Y Religion* podcast. After four years of hosting and producing the podcast, I was handing its reins over to John's capable hands and introducing him to our growing audience. During the interview, John asked me about future plans for my time and what might be next on the horizon for Religious Education's podcasts. I said:

With me not doing the week-by-week hosting and producing, . . . we're going to do some limited series that we're looking at. We want to do some things called *Y Religion Presents* and take a topic like "Y Religion presents excellent gospel teaching" or "Y Religion presents seeking by study and faith." And they will be limited series . . . on a focused subject.

Less than two years later, in the summer of 2025, that's exactly what we've done, releasing eleven episodes under the limited series header called *Y Religion Presents: Gospel Teaching*. Beginning on June 8 and concluding on August 17, 2025, a new episode was released each week on key aspects of excellent gospel teaching.

This *Gospel Teaching* series was proposed and developed by Church history and doctrine professor Casey Griffiths, a longtime member of the *Y Religion* podcast committee. Because some topics would require more than an hour-long episode, in 2023 Casey and I discussed launching some limited series on gospel subjects for *Y Religion*. Later, in September 2023, Casey sent me a formal proposal for a limited series on gospel teaching, part of which read as follows:

The Strengthening Religious Education document encourages scholarship in three areas: Academic, Gospel, and Pedagogical. . . . So far, the *Y Religion* podcast has done

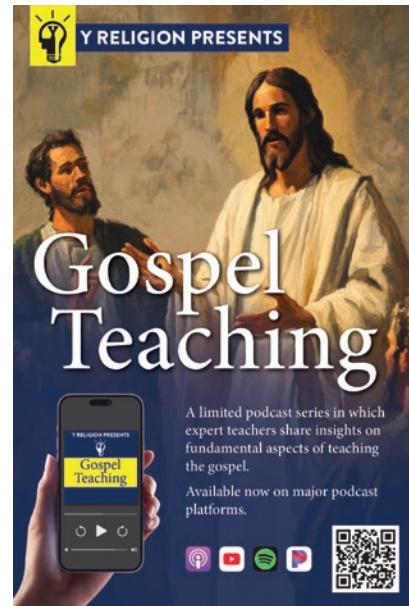


Figure 2

an excellent job highlighting research in the first two categories, but not the third area. We have some of the most well-trained and skilled religious educators on our faculty who could share their expertise in a way that would create an excellent resource for part-time, transfer, and adjunct faculty, and for

Part 1: Insights		Part 2: Strategies		Part 3: Practical Experience	
Casey Part 1 Intro Bio Guest 1	Casey Intro Guest 2	Casey Transition to Part 2 w/ Guest 1	Casey Pass to Guest 2	Casey Transition to Part 3 w/ Guest 1	Casey Pass to Guest 2
Guest 1 Part 1 Interview	Guest 2 Part 1 Interview	Guest 1 Part 2 Interview	Guest 2 Part 2 Interview	Guest 1 Part 3 Interview	Guest 2 Part 3 Interview

Figure 1

gospel teachers in the Church in general. The limited series would highlight teaching methodology and provide a basic course in successful religious teaching for Latter-day Saints.

In October 2023 I pitched the general concept of *Y Religion Presents* and Casey's proposal of an initial series titled *Gospel Teaching* to the Religious Education Administrative Council, which approved the plan. Through the fall of 2023, Casey and I collaborated on an outline of topics and presenters and the format of the episodes. How many episodes? Whom to interview? One expert per interview or two or more? If there are two or more guests, should we listen to all of guest 1 and then all of guest 2, or should we mix it up and go back and forth based on how they respond to the same question? What should be the main segments of each episode? Should we have the host offer an introduction and transition narration between segments, or just do a straight-up interview? We emailed and talked about each of these questions and more to determine the feel of the series.

We also discussed broadening the participants from beyond BYU faculty to include key teachers from other CES institutions, including Church leaders such as Elder Clark G. Gilbert (the CES Commissioner of Education) and Chad H. Webb (the administrator of Seminaries and Institutes of Religion and First Counselor in the Sunday School General Presidency).

Other General Officers who were interviewed included Bradley R. Wilcox (at the time serving in the Young Men General Presidency), Emily Belle Freeman (Young Women General President), Mark L. Pace (former Sunday School General President), and Susan Porter (Primary General President). Faculty from BYU Religious Education with training in education or specialties in the episode topics were also invited as guests, and during 2024 Casey Griffiths coordinated with and interviewed each participant.

Professor Griffiths and I decided on a format for each episode that included providing insights, strategies, and practical experiences for each topic, interviewing two experts per episode, and presenting insights from each expert in alternating fashion, with Casey as host providing introduction and transition commentary (see fig. 1). This format provided an engaging approach for the listener to hear expert insights, similarities, and differences on each question. Professor Griffiths spent many hours determining which clips should best be used to go together for each segment and recording episode intros and transitions. We hired BYU student James Call to do the post-production editing for each episode. Other BYU student editors who assisted included Andrew Dawson, Zoe Moore, and Michael Van Tassell.

In all, eleven episodes ranging from organizing a lesson to active learning and creating relevance were produced. In counsel with Religious Education administration, we decided

that the best timeline for release of the series would be in conjunction with the CES Religious Educators Conference in June 2025. Adam Hellewell from the dean's office created posters that were displayed for all CES conference attendees with information about the series and QR codes for listening and subscribing (see fig. 2). Those who would later view the conference broadcast would see a pop-up advertisement for the podcast when they logged into the Church's website, accompanied by a message from S&I administrator Chad Webb encouraging S&I teachers to listen to the series.

The podcast had positive reception from its inception. Episode 1, titled "The Power of Teaching" and featuring Elder Clark Gilbert and Chad Webb, debuted in the top one hundred religion podcasts in America, coming in at number 56 during the week of its release. Through the summer of 2025, as each new episode was released, the podcast was downloaded an average of over fifteen hundred times per day.

If you as a reader have not listened to some or all the *Y Religion Presents: Gospel Teaching* episodes, I encourage you to do so. The principles that the series and guests share are designed to help all gospel teachers improve their abilities to teach the gospel powerfully and well, no matter the audience or age. Teaching is a gift, but also a skill that can and must be sought for and improved upon—by study as well as by faith. This series can assist you in the eternally significant task of gospel teaching. ☀

LEBOLO CONFERENCE

By *Kerry Muhlestein*

KERRY MUHLESTEIN (*kerry_muhlestein@byu.edu*) IS A PROFESSOR OF ANCIENT SCRIPTURE AT BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY.

IN 1820 ANTONIO LEBOLO HAD HIS HANDS FULL WHILE living in the Luxor area of Egypt—most often with antiquities he acquired and sent to various European countries. Following Napoleon’s withdrawal from Egypt, men like Bernardino Drovetti went into Egypt in order to extract its antiquities for European nations. Lebolo became a friend and collaborator of Drovetti in Egypt, and they both worked for the French government in cooperation with the Egyptian government for a time. Lebolo contributed to Drovetti’s work by exploring the west bank of the Nile in Luxor—ancient Thebes. This helped lead to the formation of the antiquities collection that constituted the original core of the Egyptian Museum in Turin, Italy. Their work was also a substantial part of the Louvre’s initial collections.

Joseph Smith’s acquisition of these papyri began the process that would result in his translation of the Book of Abraham.

Though making a name for himself in Egypt, Lebolo was originally from Castellamonte, a small town near the northern border of Italy, famous for its traditions of ceramics. Upon his death, his family there arranged for one of his small collections to be shipped to America for its potential sale. Eventually part of that collection, four mummies and several rolls and fragments of papyri, ended up in Kirtland, Ohio. Joseph Smith’s acquisition of these papyri began the process that would result in his translation of the Book of Abraham.

For many years researchers like Jay Todd, H. Donl Peterson, Dan Jorgensen, John Gee, and others have been studying the story of how Lebolo found these papyri and how they arrived in Ohio. Recently, as Kerry Muhlestein and Richard Bennett from BYU Religious Education have been preparing a book about the Book of Abraham, Professor Bennett has collaborated closely with Terra Mia, the historical society of Castellamonte. This interaction, coupled with the sustained interest of so many researchers over a long period of time, helped the people of Castellamonte realize there was an interesting history behind the life of Lebolo, whose descendants still own the home he was born in there.

When the Egyptian museum in Turin began to plan celebrations for its two-hundredth anniversary, Emilio Champagne and his colleagues at Terra Mia wanted to honor and explore Lebolo’s life as part of the commemoration. A small group was put together to plan the event, including Champagne, Sergio Griffa (a representative of the local public affairs council for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints), Roberto Ionane and Stefano Raimondi (local Latter-day Saint ecclesiastical leaders), and Giovanni Tata, Kerry Muhlestein, and Richard Bennett (all from BYU). This project was largely the product of the Castellamonte group wanting to honor Lebolo’s impact on Egyptology and the beliefs of the Church.

The event, held in March 2025, was cosponsored by the Museo Egizio of Turin, Terra Mia, the town of Castellamonte, and Religious Education at BYU. John Gee, Kerry Muhlestein, Richard Bennett (professor emeritus), Giovanni Tata, and Scott Esplin (dean of Religious Education at BYU) went to Italy to participate. It began with a small conference at the Egyptian Museum in Turin, where a curator and the museum director spoke



Sculptor Maria Teresa Rosa speaks at the unveiling of the Lebolo monument in Castellamonte. Photo by Benjamin Muhlestein.

to BYU scholars, local Church leaders, and local Institute of Religion students. Two private tours of the museum followed, one in Italian and one in English.

The next morning, proceedings began in Castellamonte, with city leaders, local and national media representatives, and dignitaries such as Valentino Castellani, the chairman of the interfaith committee and the former mayor of Turin who hosted the 2006 Olympics after having worked with the Salt Lake City Olympic Committee. After the Castellamonte mayor, Pasquale Mazza, and other officials welcomed everyone, conference participants visited Lebolo's childhood home. There they were welcomed by his descendants, who hosted a small reception and spoke about the honor it is for their family that Lebolo had made such a significant contribution to Egyptology and to the Church. They also showed the plans for a plaque that will soon be installed at the home to explain their ancestor's importance to the world and to the international Church.

Next on the agenda was the unveiling and inauguration of a monument in the park area in the center of town.

Renowned local sculptor Maria Teresa Rosa had created a terra-cotta sculpture in keeping with the ceramic tradition for which Castellamonte is famous. She depicted Lebolo in Arabic attire (based on a portrait of him from the time period), holding a papyrus scroll that has Facsimile 1 from the Pearl of Great Price depicted on it, with a pyramid and tomb in the background. Rosa spoke about how profound it seems to her that Lebolo helped the world understand and enjoy Egyptian artifacts and that he played a role in unfolding scripture and doctrine for such an important religion. She felt she had honored both by incorporating Egyptian architectural elements and a drawing from the papyri purchased by Joseph Smith in the design of the monument.

After lunch, the academic conference began. Local and national press were present, including a national TV news station. Proceedings were conducted by Silvia Rosa Brusin, a national news personality. City officials welcomed everyone, and then Emelio Champagne spoke about Lebolo, followed by Dean Scott Esplin, who spoke in Italian about BYU's involvement. Two local scholars, Laura Donatelli and Christina Ghiringhelli, spoke about Lebolo's

life, his work in Egypt, and his role in bringing Egyptian culture to Europe. They were followed by Richard Bennett, who went into more depth about the historical, political, economic, and cultural context of Lebolo's work and its significance. Kerry Muhlestein, the final speaker, explained teachings of the Book of Abraham and showed how they matched well with the ancient owner of the papyrus that contained the original drawing of Facsimile 1. He concluded by stating how invaluable the doctrinal contribution of the Book of Abraham is to the Church. Afterward, TV stations interviewed the presenters, allowing them to talk about the significance of Lebolo's work and how important it is that people from different places, cultures, and religious backgrounds can all rejoice in the role he played in triggering the receipt of new revelation for the Church.

For example, Emilio Champagne, from Terra Mia, spoke to the media about the event in these words (translated by Scott Esplin):

Antonio Lebolo is a character from Canavese and Castellamonte who was practically unknown. He was not a man of letters. He left no works, he left no writings, he left nothing.

A curious anecdote is one that Carlo Demarchi, the owner of the Tre Re [restaurant] told me. He said that since the postwar period several Americans often came to eat in his famous restaurant. Every now and then there was someone who said, "Castellamonte, homeland of Antonio Lebolo." He was naturally surprised because he knew nothing here. Nobody knew anything. But since these things happened once in a while, he told his friend Giuseppe Perotti who was a local historian to do some research on the individual.

I experienced the second episode of this story myself because about ten years ago the town hall called me and said, "There are two Americans looking for you," and I was quite surprised and went to see them. There was a young boy and



A descendant of Antonio Lebolo shows the design of the plaque to be installed at the Lebolo home in Castellamonte, Italy. Photo by Benjamin Muhlestein.



Presenters at the academic conference honoring Lebolo included BYU professors Kerry Muhlestein and Richard Bennett. Photo by Benjamin Muhlestein.

an older person who I later discovered was a researcher from Brigham Young University, . . . and with great pleasure I made the acquaintance of Richard Bennett. He knew much, much more about the story of Lebolo than I knew. And because he knew more, this explained a bit of everything.

Our Lebolo, when he arrived from Egypt in Castellamonte, was quickly forgotten. In the space of a few decades, he was practically lost from memory. In America, like a new phoenix that rises from the ashes, the memory of Antonio Lebolo was reborn once again. And why was it reborn? Because Antonio Lebolo had found some Egyptian scrolls that were sold to Joseph Smith, and he went down in history because Joseph Smith named who had sold these papyri and who had found them. . . . We wanted to put this reproduction [of Facsimile 1 from the Pearl of Great Price on the monument] precisely for the double meaning, the first because it is actually the papyrus

that Antonio Lebolo found and, second, this is the papyrus that inspired the [Book of Abraham in the] Mormon religion.

The next day, Giovanni Tata, Scott Esplin, Richard Bennett, John Gee, and Kerry Muhlestein all spoke at a fireside for local members of the Church. Emilio Champagne and his wife, who are not members of the Church, attended the fireside. Italian Church members were able to take justifiable pride in honoring a fellow countryman who had made so great a contribution to Latter-day Saint Church history and doctrine.

The entire event was conceived and carried out as an opportunity for people of different religious backgrounds—united by mutual respect and a shared excitement for history—to rejoice together in meaningful historical events. As was often noted during the day's events, those who were from the Turin and Castellamonte areas were honored that their communities had any kind of connection with the formation of the beliefs of such an important global religion. ☀

FACULTY AND STAFF

APPOINTMENTS

Gaye Strathearn stepped down as associate dean of Religious Education to teach at the BYU Jerusalem Center for Near Eastern Studies. Lincoln H. Blumell replaced her as associate dean.

Shon D. Hopkin and Frank F. Judd Jr. stepped down as chair and associate chair of the Department of Ancient Scripture to teach at the BYU Jerusalem Center. Kerry M. Hull and Ryan H. Sharp replaced them as chair and associate chair.

Philip J. Abbott and Michael J. Biggerstaff were hired as assistant professors of ancient scripture. David M. Calabro and David B. Ridge were hired as assistant professors of ancient scripture in the Jerusalem Center professorial track.

Sherilyn Farnes and Stephanie Dibb Sorensen were hired as assistant professors of Church history and doctrine.

W. Justin Dyer was appointed editor in chief of BYU Studies.

Derek E. Gurr was hired as digital content manager for the BYU Religious Studies Center, BYU Studies, and the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship.

Brad Taylor was appointed as a visiting assistant teaching professor.

AWARDS

Connie Brace received the Dean's Special Recognition for Citizenship.

Leigh Ann Copas received the BYU Vice President's Performance Award for Winter 2025.

W. Justin Dyer received the Harvey B. & Susan Easton Black Outstanding Scholarship in Church History & Doctrine Award.

Nicholas J. Frederick received the B. West Belnap Citizenship Award.

Michael A. Goodman received the Richard Lloyd Anderson Research Award.

Jared M. Halverson received the Outstanding Teaching in Ancient Scripture Award.

Andrew H. Hedges received the Robert J. Matthews Teaching Award.

Adam Hellewell received the Dean's Special Recognition for Citizenship.

Joshua R. McDaniel received the Dean's Special Recognition for Citizenship.

Brian Mead received the Outstanding Teaching in Church History and Doctrine Award.

Kerry Muhlestein received the Harvey B. & Susan Easton Black Outstanding Scholarship in Ancient Scripture Award.

Ryan H. Sharp received the Early Career Teaching Award.

Hank R. Smith received the Outstanding Citizenship in Ancient Scripture Award.

Lori Soza received the Dean's Special Recognition for Citizenship.

Joseph M. Spencer received the Dean's Special Recognition for Scholarship.

Jordan T. Watkins received the Outstanding Citizenship in Church History and Doctrine Award.

Brad Wilcox received the Loretta C. Gledhill Teaching and Learning Faculty Fellowship.

Traci Wright received the Dean's Special Recognition for Citizenship.

Beverly Yellowhorse received the Dean's Special Recognition for Citizenship.

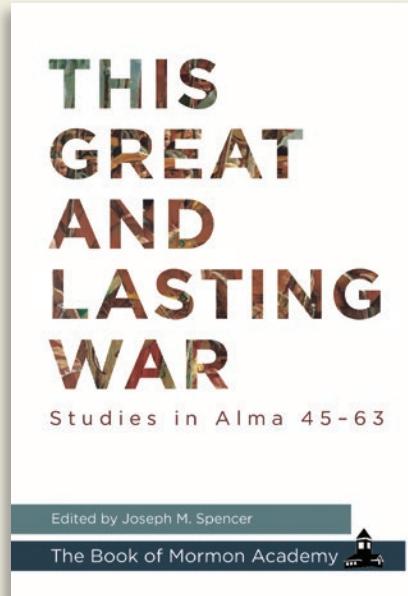
RETIRING

Byron R. Merrill retired on July 1.

Brent R. Nordgren retired on August 1.

RECENT AND UPCOMING PUBLICATIONS

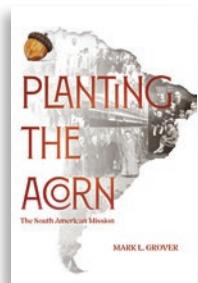
To purchase any of the following publications, please visit www.deseretbook.com and search by book title, or call Deseret Book toll-free at 888-846-7302.



This Great and Lasting War: Studies in Alma 45–63

EDITED BY JOSEPH M. SPENCER

The latter part of the Book of Mormon's book of Alma is sometimes referred to as "the war chapters." However, the relevant chapters are much more complex than often assumed, focusing on the nature of covenant, the love of God, and the way human beings establish their identities. The record alerts readers to challenges uniquely faced by women, the difficulty of handling complicated relationships, and the need to make good choices. The text enlightens its adherents on the meaning of scripture in different contexts, how prophets intervene on behalf of the downtrodden and look to God's future interventions in the world, and what it means to see God in the concrete details of life. As we strive to build peace in response to President Russell M. Nelson's recent prophetic cry, we find in the words of his ancient prophetic predecessors inspiration to go on in the cause of Christ. US \$29.99



Planting the Acorn: The South American Mission

MARK L. GROVER

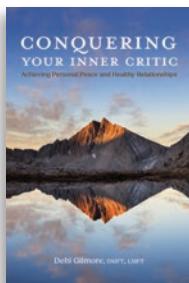
On a hot, humid Christmas Day in Argentina, Elders

Melvin J. Ballard, Rulon S. Wells, and Rey L. Pratt prayed to dedicate South America for the preaching of

the restored gospel. They organized the South American Mission, and Elder Ballard later predicted, "The work of the Lord will grow slowly for a time here just as an oak grows slowly from an acorn. The South American Mission will be a power in the Church." The choice they made to expand missionary work outside traditional European converts in South America marked a turning point. The result was the permanent

establishment of the Church in Argentina and the opening of the Church in Brazil. Further, the South American Mission was the foundation for the impressive hundred-year growth and expansion of the Church in South America. US \$29.99





**Conquering
Your Inner
Critic:
Achieving
Personal Peace
and Healthy
Relationships**

DEBI GILMORE

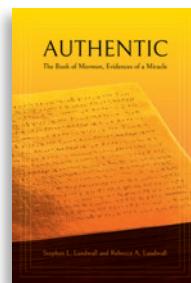
Our inner critical voice can block our ability to recognize and use our unique gifts and talents that are essential in our quest to learn, progress, and become better people despite the challenges of life. Written with members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in mind, this book follows proven clinical methodologies and offers helpful faith-based principles and perspectives that also can be effective for anyone struggling with self-defeating tendencies. Readers will explore key steps to identify, reject, and rise above their inner critical voice to discover, cultivate, and preserve their deeper, wiser, and authentic self. The goal is unlocking hope, long-term healing, and personal, social, and spiritual empowerment. US \$27.99



**Prepare Me for
Thy Use:
Lessons from
Wilford
Woodruff's
Mission Years**

KRISTY
WHEELWRIGHT
TAYLOR

This book explores Wilford Woodruff's early discipleship during his missionary service in the United States and Great Britain. Drawing from his letters and personal journals, this book takes a thematic look at Wilford's unwavering dedication to hard work, obedience, meticulous recordkeeping, gratitude, and consecration. Kristy Wheelwright Taylor weaves together his personal anecdotes and spiritual insights in a historical context to make his story both relatable and inspiring for modern readers. The themes provide rich material for personal study or for Church settings, seminary, institute, or mission preparation. Readers will find valuable insights from the story of one man's spiritual progression that can be applied to their own path of discipleship. US \$24.99

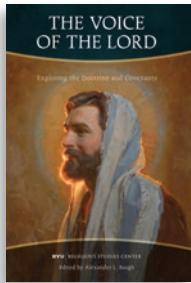


**Authentic:
The Book of
Mormon,
Evidences of
a Miracle**

STEPHEN L.
LUNDWALL AND
REBECCA A.
LUNDWALL

As the last custodian of a record spanning over two millennia, Moroni invited modern readers to do what he himself had done: reflect on God's mercy "from the creation of Adam even down until the time that ye shall receive these things" (Moroni 10:3). That mercy is evident not only in the profound teachings contained in the Book of Mormon but also in the miraculous journey of the record itself—a sacred text that was meticulously preserved and passed down through generations by prophetic guardians. *Authentic* explores the provenance of this ancient book of scripture: how it was safeguarded against destruction, delivered by an angel, and ultimately translated and published in our time. Examining the text's history reveals an unbroken chain of inspired recordkeepers who intentionally structured the text for future investigation. The Book of Mormon is a rare book whose creation and transmission seem designed to withstand the test of time, a remarkable record of ancient provenance made possible only by divine providence. US \$31.99

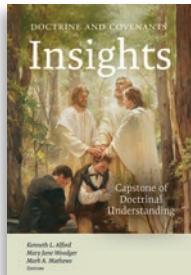




The Voice of the Lord: Exploring the Doctrine and Covenants

EDITED BY
ALEXANDER L.
BAUGH

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). US \$29.99



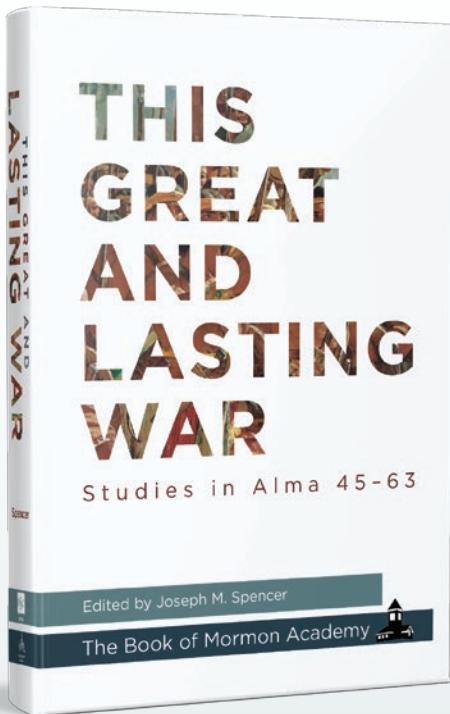
Doctrine and Covenants Insights: Capstone of Doctrinal Understanding

EDITED BY
KENNETH L.
ALFORD, MARY
JANE WOODGER, AND MARK A.
MATHEWS

This book is designed to supplement the 2025 Doctrine and Covenants *Come, Follow Me* Church curriculum year. The Doctrine and Covenants beautifully illustrates that the Lord Jesus Christ lives and speaks today. By integrating both spiritual and secular understanding and insights, this volume explores how the Doctrine and Covenants teaches doctrine, principles, laws, prophecies, typologies, and gospel applications. US \$29.99



THIS GREAT AND LASTING WAR



The latter part of the Book of Mormon's book of Alma is sometimes referred to as "the war chapters." However, the relevant chapters are much more complex than often assumed, focusing on the nature of covenant, the love of God, and the way human beings establish their identities. The record alerts readers to challenges uniquely faced by women, the difficulty of handling complicated relationships, and the need to make good choices. The text enlightens its adherents about the meaning of scripture in different contexts, how prophets intervene on behalf of the downtrodden and look to God's future interventions in the world, and what it means to see God in the concrete details of life.

ACCESS OVER 7,000 ARTICLES FROM
RELIGIOUS STUDIES CENTER BOOKS, JOURNALS,
AND MAGAZINES ONLINE AT **RSC.BYU.EDU**



BYU

RELIGIOUS STUDIES CENTER



A Stepping Stone Toward Her Career

When Kamea Wheeler says she loves the desert, she isn't talking about the Utah kind of desert with trees and grass here and there. No, she means a full-on desert—like the one near the “two-stoplight town” of Bloomfield, New Mexico, where she grew up.

Now she works on the lush green campus of BYU as a part-time web specialist at the Religious Studies Center (RSC), a stepping-stone job on her way to her chosen career.

Because Kamea loved chemistry, she initially majored in chemical engineering. But she began to yearn for something else. That something else turned out to be user experience design.

Kamea loves working at the RSC. “I get to see the whole process from end to end, and I love that they do so much to publish the gospel of Jesus Christ.”

Knowing that mentored campus jobs are largely donor funded, she appreciates that someone acted selflessly to help her. In fact, she says, she is at BYU

“I love that they do so much to publish the gospel of Jesus Christ.”

only because of the help of generous donors. Her parents have helped with her tuition, but for the most part she is getting through school by working hard to qualify for scholarships, paid research positions, and mentorships—three mainstays of BYU’s Inspiring Learning Initiative.

“I am so, so grateful for donors and for the chance to be on this beautiful campus,” she says.

You will love the conferences sponsored by the Religious Studies Center. They feature popular speakers discussing outstanding gospel topics. And they are free!



Don't miss out!

Make time for these upcoming Religious Education events.

**2026 BYU Religious Education Symposium
in Honor of Sidney B. Sperry** *Friday–Saturday, January 23–24, 2026*

See page 3 for more information.