



# Insights: The Newsletter of the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship

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## Documentary Exploring the Life of Jesus Christ Planned

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# INSIGHTS

The Newsletter of the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship

## IN THIS ISSUE

Update: El Niño and Lehi's Voyage, page 2

Transcription of Syriac Texts, page 4

New Issue of *BYU Studies*, page 6

Volume 27  
Number 6  
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## Occasional Papers Spotlights the Book of Mormon

The latest issue of the Maxwell Institute's *Occasional Papers* (number 5 in the series) focuses exclusively on what Joseph Smith called "the most correct of any book on earth, and the keystone of our religion"—the Book of Mormon. As M. Gerald Bradford, editor of the series and associate executive director of the Maxwell Institute notes, "the papers in this volume show that the Book of Mormon can be studied and understood from a wide variety of scholarly disciplines."


The lead-off article is a Book of Mormon chronology offering a detailed view of the book's remarkable history, from the early visits of Moroni to the critical text project now in progress, from the Danish translation in 1851 to the Twi (a language spoken in Ghana) translation in 2005.

In "That Most Important of All Books': A Printing History of the Book of Mormon," David J. Whittaker surveys the printing history of the Book of Mormon in the English language, focusing on the first edition of 1830, as well as on other editions published before Joseph Smith's death in 1844. Throughout this printing history, Church leaders have sought to make the volume available in both an accurate and useful format but with the key

concern being its role in bettering the lives of those who read it.

The next article, "The Golden Bible in the Bible's Golden Age," offers a perspective on the Book of Mormon from a prominent scholar who is not a Latter-day Saint—Paul Gutjahr, professor at Indiana University. As Gutjahr points out, many early converts to Mormonism frequently spoke of how they came to faith in Joseph Smith's teachings by reading the Book of Mormon and the Bible side-by-side. "It is obvious by the virtue of the place Mormonism holds as the world's fastest growing religion that the book which gave the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints its popular name is one of the most important written texts ever to emerge in the United States."

In "His Secret is with the Righteous': Instructional Wisdom in the Book of Mormon," Alyson Skabelund Von Feldt shows that many writers in the Book of Mormon were familiar with the literary forms, themes, and vocabulary of Hebrew wisdom literature. What's more, Book of Mormon authors clearly understood the search for wisdom to be a quest for eternal life and the mysteries of God.

*Occasional Papers* number 5 is now available through the BYU Bookstore. For more information, call 1-800-253-2578 or visit the Web site at [byubookstore.com](http://byubookstore.com). 

## Documentary Exploring the Life of Jesus Christ Planned

With the full backing of the BYU administration, the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship—in partnership with Religious Education, BYU Broadcasting and the department of Theatre and Media Arts—is laying plans to begin filming a seven-part documentary series on the ministry and life of Jesus Christ, beginning with his role as premortal Deity, continuing through his mortality, and ending with his role as judge of all. The series is provisionally titled *Messiah: Behold the Lamb of God*. The project envisions a high definition series that presents the views of Brigham Young

University scholars. Each of the twenty-six minute episodes will explore a segment of the Savior's mission and will feature contemporary scholarly discussions regarding the Savior's ministry.

The series was conceived by S. Kent Brown, current director of FARMS and the Laura F. Willes Center for Book of Mormon Studies, largely in response to the impressively produced 1998 PBS documentary series *From Jesus to Christ*. Although that series offered a lot of good information about Jesus and his times, its editors began from a viewpoint of non-faith. Brown judged that a documentary series that rests on the broader range of LDS scripture, paired with insights from modern

*continued on page 5*

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## *Journey of Faith: The New World* Screened in Hawaii

On November 9, 2007, the new Willes Center-sponsored DVD, *Journey of Faith: The New World*, was shown to a large audience in the IMAX Theater of the Polynesian Cultural Center in Laie, Hawaii, adjacent to the campus of BYU–Hawaii. The screening was offered in connection with a three-day international business conference cosponsored by the University. The founder of the Laura F. Willes Center for Book of Mormon Studies, Mark H. Willes, opened the screening by explaining how the film came about, its significance as a study aid to help all better understand the cultural and geographical setting of events leading up to the Savior’s visit in the New World, and also the anticipated impact of similar projects on students of “The Lord’s Book.”

## Documentary on Life of Christ


*continued from page 1*

prophets and apostles, will offer to Latter-day Saints, particularly college-age individuals, a more complete picture of the Savior, his times, and his notable achievements.

In 1999, Brown gathered together a blue-ribbon panel of BYU scholars whose combined efforts produced a ninety-page basic document that, since then, has guided students, faculty members, and filmmakers who have worked on the project. As is customary, the basic document and the film script that rests on it have undergone several rigorous reviews that have refined and improved the information that will appear in the final film.

As background, groups and individuals within the academic world are looking critically at Jesus as a historical figure. Many question the validity of the gospel accounts based on inconsistencies—between the gospels themselves, between the Bible and other historical documents, and between the apostles’ stories and what is thought to be “known” of the culture. They are constructing a revised history of Christianity based on modern notions of ethnography, social science, etc. Although no consensus view exists among so many scholars, the general leaning is similar, in that it moves away from the divine or

The screening was followed by a question-and-answer session conducted by Peter Johnson, the film’s director, and Andrew Skinner, executive director of the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, which is the administrative home of the Willes Center. “Projects of this kind, which illustrate the profundity and truth of the Book of Mormon are the very things the Willes Center was created to support,” said Professor Skinner, “and we anticipate many more in the coming years.”

The Laura F. Willes Center for Book of Mormon Studies awards faculty scholarships to encourage important research on the Book of Mormon. Some awards include support for research on the BYU campus, but an awardee can pursue research from any locale as long as the topic relates to the Book of Mormon. Please go to our Web site at [willescenter.byu.edu](http://willescenter.byu.edu) for more information. 

miraculous. In their broad view, Jesus was a charismatic leader, a traditional mystic, a wise philosopher, or (perhaps most popularly at the moment) a social critic and an instigator. In this perspective, his followers were zealots, biased and inaccurate in their writing, and their collective enthusiasm produced the visions attributed to a resurrection. Significantly, according to this view, the persistence of the Savior’s reputation and following is largely inexplicable.

The project *Messiah: Behold the Lamb of God* will also include a Web site where the resources used in the television broadcast (the standard works, statements of modern prophets and apostles, and historical records) can be accessed to allow viewers to explore further beliefs and doctrines about Jesus Christ.

The seven parts will include: Premortal Savior, Birth, Authority, Ministry, Death, Resurrection, Apostasy and Restoration. 