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**Title** The Savior's Final Hours

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**Abstract** Review of *From the Last Supper through the Resurrection: The Savior's Final Hours* (2003), edited by Richard Neitzel Holzapfel and Thomas A. Wayment.

# THE SAVIOR'S FINAL HOURS

M. Gerald Bradford

When members of the church go to their local bookstore and browse the section containing Latter-day Saint titles, they may see a new book, *From the Last Supper through the Resurrection*. They may notice it is published by Deseret Book and put it back on the shelf, assuming it is just another book on the New Testament by and for Latter-day Saints. If they do this, they will have made a mistake. Those in the church who are serious about their study of the scriptures should own and read this book. It focuses on key events in the last two days of the Savior's mortal ministry and may well prove to be the most important scholarly book on the New Testament written by faithful Latter-day Saints in more than a generation.

In part this is because the contributors critically evaluate and incorporate into their work the latest developments and insights in biblical studies to the extent that they shed new light on our knowledge of crucial events leading up to the Savior's crucifixion and resurrection. As a result, others not of our faith may also be interested in the book for what it can add to their understanding and appreciation of Jesus of

Review of Richard Neitzel Holzapfel and Thomas A. Wayment, eds. *From the Last Supper through the Resurrection: The Savior's Final Hours*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2003. xxvi + 502 pp., with index. \$24.95.

Nazareth and because they might well want to know what Latter-day Saints think about the subject.

Richard Neitzel Holzapfel<sup>1</sup> teamed up with Thomas A. Wayment<sup>2</sup> to edit this collection of studies. In addition, the editors wrote three of the fourteen articles in the anthology.<sup>3</sup> Chapters include a study of Jesus's prophecies of his own pending death and resurrection and a retelling and evaluation of key episodes leading up to the Savior's final hours (both of which set the historical and theological context for the other studies in the collection), two in-depth studies of the Last Supper, reflections on the significance of what happened in the Garden of Gethsemane, three studies on the arrest and so-called "trial of Jesus," one study on the crucifixion, and one on the resurrection, along with a study of earlier accounts of the Passion found in the writings of Paul, thoughts on who was responsible for the Savior's death, and remarks on false teachings that have persisted, from that time to the present, aimed at debunking the reality of the physical resurrection.

All the entries in the book are well written. The contributors identify and deal with salient features associated with each of the events

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1. Holzapfel took his PhD in ancient history from the University of California, Irvine, with an emphasis on early Christianity, particularly the emergence of Pauline Christianity. He is on the faculty of the Department of Church History and Doctrine at Brigham Young University. With S. Kent Brown, he recently published an important work on the intertestamental period entitled, *Between the Testaments: From Malachi to Matthew* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2002). Brown, who contributed the article on "The Arrest" of Jesus in *From the Last Supper through the Resurrection*, is professor of ancient scripture and director of the Ancient Studies Program at BYU. He did his PhD work at Brown University where he studied early Christianity, with a focus on the New Testament and traditions about the James the Just.

2. Wayment recently completed his PhD in New Testament studies at Claremont Graduate School in California. His dissertation was on the Gospel of John. He is on the faculty of BYU's Department of Ancient Scripture.

3. Other contributors include Richard D. Draper, Jo Ann H. Seely, David Rolph Seely, C. Wilfred Griggs, Terry B. Ball, S. Kent Brown, Dana M. Pike, Kent P. Jackson, and M. Catherine Thomas, all of whom are (or have been) in BYU's Department of Ancient Scripture and are authorities on the New Testament, many having done their training directly in this field of study. They were joined by Cecilia M. Peek and Eric D. Huntsman, both classicists from the university's Department of Humanities, Classics, and Comparative Literature and both experts in the ancient world of Palestine at the time of the Savior's mortal ministry. Huntsman has subsequently moved to the Department of Ancient Scripture.

and issues covered. They help the reader better understand the nature of scholarly debates surrounding each subject while, at the same time, acknowledging what can and cannot be known given existing textual records and the current state of scholarship. For the most part, they present their findings in well-reasoned, fully documented, and convincing ways.

Many of the subjects dealt with in the book are complicated and may prove to be a bit demanding for some readers. Those who persist will find the effort rewarding. Readers will often discover new insights and may find that their thinking has changed as a result of how the authors painstakingly lay out and analyze each subject. They will come away with an added appreciation for the meaning and significance of these key events in the final days of the mortal life of the Savior because of how the contributors weave together the results of their scholarship with their personal testimonies of the Savior.

Herein lies what is distinctive about the book. These faithful scholars have made a concerted effort not to rework old scholarship on the New Testament but rather to fully engage the latest developments in biblical studies resulting from recent archaeological discoveries, newly discovered ancient documents, and improved access to such material, all of which greatly enhance our knowledge of the ancient world of the Middle East at the time of the Savior.

What's more, their studies are judiciously informed by recent developments and refinements in New Testament critical studies. In this regard they are entering into dialogue with other New Testament scholars in a common quest for truths that can be discerned in this manner. Such text-critical studies can help scholars sort through a host of issues centering on what often appear to be interpolations, changes, or editing of the biblical text that have taken place over time and can assist them in coming to some tentative conclusions as to what might have been in earlier versions of the texts. They can also be a means of systematically dealing with differing witnesses of a common event, as often happens in the four Gospels.

Contemporary New Testament critical studies is a pluralism of competing claims and positions.<sup>4</sup> At one end are those who, like the contributors to this anthology, acknowledge Jesus of Nazareth as the Savior, view the writings of the New Testament as authentic and reliable witnesses of him, and believe not only in his many teachings and miracles but wholly accept his greatest miracle of all, the resurrection. At the other end of the spectrum are scholars who profess doubts about who Jesus really was; reject most of the sayings, teachings, and deeds traditionally attributed to him; dismiss the New Testament record as an unreliable historical account; and, in some instances, openly deny that Jesus ever existed. Successfully negotiating this diverse field is difficult and has been accomplished in this instance because of the particular scholarly training each of the contributors brings to the task and, more importantly, because each of them acknowledges that they come to their reading and study of the New Testament informed by and convinced of the truths of the restored gospel as found in this sacred text and other restoration scripture. They have demonstrated, in other words, what it means for them and others to speak what President Kimball calls “the language of scholarship and faith” (p. vii).

This book amply demonstrates that relying on these recent developments and employing these refined methodological approaches

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4. In his introduction, Andrew C. Skinner, dean of Religious Education at BYU, deals with this issue and briefly calls attention to some of the pitfalls that can result from uncritically relying on positions taken by some scholars who begin and end their study of the New Testament and of Jesus from a decidedly naturalistic perspective. Those interested in pursuing this subject further may profit from reading Raymond Martin's *The Elusive Messiah: A Philosophical Overview of the Quest for the Historical Jesus* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1999). Martin is a philosopher at the University of Maryland. He is interested in the age-old question of faith and reason and how this is played out in terms of how Christian belief can properly respond to the challenge of secular historical scholarship, particularly as it is expressed in the form of much of what currently goes on in New Testament critical studies. The value of his book lies not so much in his advice on how Christians should position themselves in regard to their secular critics, but in his helpful retelling of the history of biblical criticism, his insightful summaries of positions taken by a number of prominent New Testament scholars writing today, and, in particular, his careful ferreting out of key presuppositions that influence and govern the way these scholars arrive at the various positions they have taken. Knowledge of where leading New Testament scholars are coming from is indispensable to those intent on making proper use of their work.

in careful and balanced ways has enabled many of the contributors to gain new and important insights into the Savior's final hours that otherwise would not have been possible. As a consequence, they have immeasurably enhanced our understanding and appreciation of the Savior and the New Testament.

This is the first of three companion volumes. The editors hope to be able to assemble two additional comparable collections dealing with other salient events in the life of the Savior as recounted in the New Testament. The next volume will treat the nativity narratives up to and including the Sermon on the Mount. This will be followed by a collection that will cover subsequent events in the Savior's life up to his triumphal entry into Jerusalem.

*From the Last Supper through the Resurrection* has significantly raised the bar in terms of the quality of scripture studies that can and should be produced by Latter-day Saint scholars. It represents some of the best thinking and expressions of faith on the subject. And it is timely, appearing as it does when there is an increasing interest in this country and abroad in the subject of Jesus, particularly in the manner and meaning of his death. The question is, how many outside the church know our position on the Savior in anything like the detail provided in this book? And herein lies a challenge.

How can we get books like *From the Last Supper through the Resurrection* into the academic scholarly market? As a result of the worldwide growth of the church, universities in this country and abroad are establishing Mormon Studies programs. The best way to insure that books like Holzapfel and Wayment's are known and selected for use in such curriculum is to make sure that such titles are distributed within the academic market by publishers with reputations for producing top-quality scholarly work.

I began by noting that Deseret Book published this book.<sup>5</sup> They should be applauded for this and for insuring that it is distributed

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5. They did a fine job with this book. It is reader friendly in that it includes footnotes rather than endnotes, a departure from virtually all of their other titles. It would, however, have been helpful if each entry included a bibliography and a list of related recommended readings for those who want to pursue their studies further. And unfortunately, they used a painting by Simon Dewey called "The Last Supper" to adorn the dust jacket. The artist

widely among interested members of the church. If they are successful with this title, they might consider venturing into the academic publishing field, following the lead of other comparable publishers who have made such a transition, thereby insuring that such scholarly titles get into the hands of others as well as Latter-day Saints. At one point, Deseret Book moved into other niche markets, using various imprints. If they were to do this again and made a concerted effort to supply a limited number of high-quality scholarly titles in this admittedly narrow but important market, they would make a major contribution to a growing need within the church.<sup>6</sup>

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portrays the Savior sitting at a table alone, his head covered, breaking a piece of unleavened bread. A friend called my attention to this and pointed out how regrettable it was that a book like this, one in which the contributors have striven as hard as they have to make the ancient world of the Savior come alive for us, should have a cover that is so inaccurate—depicting as it does the Savior at the Last Supper, alone and in a decidedly contemporary pose. Much of what the Last Supper was and is all about is reflected in the fact that it was and is a communal meal. Most assuredly, the Savior was not alone at that fateful event. And when he and his followers partook of the meal, they would have been reclining, as was their custom, not seated.

6. Getting a commercial publisher such as Deseret Book to do its part in filling this need is only part of the challenge, however. Brigham Young University really needs to take the lead in such an effort. This would mean reviving Brigham Young University Press, which, at present, exists in name only. It would mean adequately funding such an operation. If this could be done, and if partnerships in such ventures could be established with Deseret Book and others, it would insure that the very best in LDS scholarship, on an array of subjects by a number of contributors, would be produced and properly distributed within the field of academic publishing. The recent appearance of Holzapfel and Wayment's book and the promise of companion volumes to come; the fact that an increasing number of publications, produced and paid for by various units on campus, are using the BYU Press imprint; and the fact that a number of comparable high-quality scholarly works are presently in the works by scholars at BYU and elsewhere may well signal that the time has come to rethink the need for such a commitment on the part of the university. At least part of what BYU is mandated to do is to build bridges with scholars and others, in several disciplines, throughout the world. Books such as *From the Last Supper through the Resurrection*, provided they are known within the academic world, are a powerful means of doing just that.