“Of all the treasures of knowledge, the most vital is the knowledge of God—of His existence, His powers, His love, and His promises.”
ON THE COVER:
Radiant sunlight bursts through the clouds, representing the light of revealed truth.

“Of all the treasures of knowledge, the most vital is the knowledge of God—of His existence, His powers, His love, and His promises.”

_Elder Dieter F. Uchtdorf_
In this issue of the *Religious Educator*, we are pleased to publish several essays that are based on talks given at BYU in 2006, including Elder Dieter F. Uchtdorf’s thoughtful BYU Education Week devotional address, “Truth Restored.”

Each year about Easter time, the popular media turn attention to Jesus Christ, the New Testament, and the early Church. Last year, it was *National Geographic’s* report of a long-lost gospel, “The Gospel of Judas” (a Gnostic text that provides no historically reliable information about the Savior’s last days). This year, it was Discovery Channel’s *The Lost Tomb of Jesus* (a film that provides no new information about first-century Jewish burial practices but offers lots of unfounded speculation about Jesus’s supposed burial place). Such media hype often diminishes quickly, but the resultant attention provides faithful disciple-scholars an opportunity to think about “those things which are most surely believed among us, even as they delivered them unto us, which from the beginning were eyewitnesses, and ministers of the word” (Luke 1:1–2).

A few years ago, Professor Thomas A. Wayment and I organized an Easter conference to celebrate the life and ministry of Jesus Christ from both a scholarly perspective and a perspective of faith—beginning a dialogue about important issues in New Testament current scholarship and popular ideas about Jesus as presented in the media. The tradition continued, and this past year President Cecil O. Samuelson and Academic Vice President John S. Tanner offered two excellent talks at the Easter Conference, which we are pleased to include in this issue.

At the same conference, Joseph Fielding McConkie provided an intimate look at the context of his father’s last conference address. Like other significant historical moments, such as the assassination of John F. Kennedy (1963), Neil Armstrong’s first steps on the moon (1969), and the fall of the Berlin Wall (1989), Latter-day Saints living in 1985 will long remember Elder Bruce R. McConkie’s talk, “The Purifying Power of Gethsemane.”

We are pleased to continue with our New Testament theme in this issue with an essay by Gaye Strathearn and Frank F. Judd Jr., one by Thomas A. Wayment, and one by Brian M. Hauglid, all of whom are professors at BYU.

Finally, at the request of the Religious Education Administrative Council, we include an edited version of my keynote address delivered in October 2006 at the thirty-fifth annual Sidney B. Sperry Symposium, “*The Da Vinci Code*, the Gospel of Judas, and Other Bad Ideas.”

The above comments reflect merely a taste of what you will find inside the covers of this issue. Enjoy!

Richard Neitzel Holzapfel
Editor-in-Chief
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Volume 8 Number 2 • 2007

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“We should simply be grateful with all our hearts for the truth restored and for the privilege of bringing this truth and these eternal blessings to our brothers and sisters.”

Elder Dieter F. Uchtdorf
My dear brothers and sisters, Brigham Young University has always been a very special place to our family. When our children were teenagers, they attended the different summer programs on the BYU campus. And my wife, Harriet, and I went to a course called Especially for Parents, aimed to improve parenting. We never dared ask our children whether this class really improved our parenting. I have to admit, however, that they turned out to be great kids anyhow. I account this to the goodness of their mother and the tender mercies of God.

In those younger years, my wife and I enjoyed very much the opportunities to occasionally come all the way from Germany to attend BYU Campus Education Week. Back then we stayed at Helaman Halls, and for this short period of time we felt like real BYU students. We met great people and had a wonderful time. My wife was super-perfect in planning our days. Because we wanted to learn as much as possible, she scheduled each of us for different lectures. Then, during lunch breaks and in the evenings, we exchanged notes and shared our impressions. We still have many books filled with notes—unfortunately never again to be looked at after we left the campus. But make no mistake—it was a great experience; and we will always treasure these wonderful memories very close to our hearts.

Sister Uchtdorf and I are so happy to be with you today and feel of your wonderful spirit. We are grateful for your testimonies and for
your dedication as members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. You are living witnesses of the truth restored. We thank you for your exemplary lives as mothers and fathers, single adults, single parents, and grandparents. We know that many of you have come from far away and at a significant sacrifice. I also would like to thank all who have organized this education week and all who will teach and are teaching.

I am especially grateful for this year’s theme—Seek Learning—which is taken from the Lord’s injunction to “seek learning, even by study and also by faith” (D&C 88:118).

The restored Church of Jesus Christ has always encouraged its members to pursue knowledge and education through study and also by faith—line upon line and precept upon precept.

For us, knowledge is understood to be an active, motivating force rather than simply a passive awareness of facts. Indeed, certain truths must be understood and applied because they are essential for salvation and eternal life (see John 17:3; 1 John 4:7–8). The Prophet Joseph Smith taught that “a man is saved no faster than he gets knowledge, for if he does not get knowledge, he will be brought into captivity.”¹ His words build on the Savior’s commandment, “Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32).

It is knowledge of truth that makes us free to exercise our moral agency and freedom of choice (see Helaman 14:30–31). God Himself defines His glory in terms of light and truth. In modern-day revelation, we read, “The glory of God is intelligence, or, in other words, light and truth” (D&C 93:36). Perhaps this is why “pure knowledge . . . shall greatly enlarge the soul” (D&C 121:42). The more knowledge of truth we have, the better we can progress spiritually.

The scriptures encourage us to seek deeply and broadly to gain knowledge of both heavenly and earthly things (see D&C 88:77–80).

What is this knowledge, this intelligence, this light and truth that our Heavenly Father would have us receive? Certainly it is found in the scriptures and in the words of the living prophets. But it also includes what we consider to be secular. Some of the early Apostles had little secular learning, whereas others were highly educated in the eyes of the world. Regardless of their different backgrounds in secular education, all the Apostles knew the weightier matters of life; all of them knew the path to eternal life.

We are wise, therefore, to keep a balanced and eternal perspective when seeking and studying all knowledge—revealed and secular. If we proceed on this path, we will learn to master ourselves, which in turn
enables us to master this beautiful earth and its vast opportunities. And it will help us to become a more effective tool in the hands of the Lord. It will help us to become peacemakers in a world of wars and rumors of war.

My dear brothers and sisters, let us remember that all truth, all pure knowledge, can be circumscribed by the restored gospel of Jesus Christ. Of all the treasures of knowledge, the most vital is the knowledge of God—of His existence, His powers, His love, and His promises. This is why the Restoration of the gospel is such a tremendous blessing and of such great importance for every one of us. Every gift and power and grace of God that was available when Jesus Christ walked the earth has been restored in our time.

Through the knowledge of the Restoration, we learn that God has a plan for us that will enable us to both enjoy the beauties of life and cope with its sorrows and disappointments. This divine plan was established before the foundation of the earth and can enable us to return to our Heavenly Father one day. The sacred knowledge of this plan brought us joy when we accepted it in our premortal life, and it gives us an eternal vision as we follow it in this life.

The Restoration opens doors to glorious sources of knowledge and wisdom. Jesus taught, “The Spirit of truth . . . will guide you into all truth” (John 16:13). And the Book of Mormon, a tangible witness of this Restoration, speaks to us through the prophet Moroni, that “by the power of the Holy Ghost [we] may know the truth of all things” (Moroni 10:5).

Secular knowledge alone can never save a soul or open the celestial kingdom to anyone. Life itself, the gospel and God cannot be understood through research alone. For that understanding, we must be taught from on high. Jacob reminds us, “To be learned is good if [we] hearken unto the counsels of God” (2 Nephi 9:29). The ancient word hearken means to listen and to pay attention to God’s words given through the scriptures and by the living prophets. Faithful application of gospel principles is the key. Applying knowledge of divine truth leads to wisdom.

Our learning, even by study and also by faith, when directed toward the Restoration, will give us supernal knowledge and wisdom to cope with the challenges of daily life and prepare us to receive all the blessings of eternity.

Therefore, I would like to make this message my testimony of the “restitution of all things” (Acts 3:21)—meaning, of course, the restoration of all things. God lives, and He speaks today as He did anciently.
This is the message and the testimony we as Church members need to have in our hearts and in our minds and carry into all the world.

As we share our testimony with others, I hope we will have the same convincing power and enthusiasm the members had who brought the message to Brigham Young. He said: “The brethren who came to preach the Gospel to me, I could easily out-talk them . . . ; but their testimony was like fire in my bones; I understood the spirit of their preaching; I received that spirit; it was light, intelligence, power, and truth, and it bore witness to my spirit, and that was enough for me.”

Please allow me at this point to give special thanks to my wife, Harriet, for her witness and testimony of the Restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ. And let me share with you the story of how my wife’s family became converted to the gospel many years ago.

One Sunday when I was a teenager attending the Frankfurt Branch in Germany, the missionaries brought a young mother and her two beautiful daughters to our church meetings. At that age, I had no real interest in girls; however, I still remember the impressions I had when I saw those two young girls walking into our chapel. The older daughter especially, with her large brown eyes and beautiful black hair, immediately caught my attention. I thought, “These missionaries are doing a really great job!” Little did I know that this young lady would later bless my life forever.

But I’m getting ahead of the story. Let me go back and start with how this young family met the missionaries.

In the fall of 1954, two missionaries were ringing the doorbells inside of an apartment building in the city of Frankfurt. Beginning with the doors on the main level, they gradually worked their way up the floors without any success. No one invited them in or wanted to listen to their message. But these were dedicated and faithful missionaries, and they did not give up or try another, perhaps more fruitful, apartment building. Finally, they rang the bell of the last door on the fourth floor. It was opened by young Harriet Reich, who immediately asked her mother to invite them in. Sister Carmen Reich initially hesitated, but after some additional pleading by Harriet, she finally invited Elder Gary Jenkins from California and his companion into their home.

These two missionaries were truly guided by the Spirit, not only in where to go but also in what to say. After briefly explaining who they were and what the message was they wanted to share, the missionaries left a Book of Mormon with the mother, asked her to read the marked scriptures, and departed with a prayer and a blessing. Two days later they returned. This time the missionaries received a friendly welcome
and were invited in quickly. When they asked Sister Reich if she had read the marked scriptures in the Book of Mormon, she answered without hesitation, “I read the whole book, and I feel that it is true.”

Sister Carmen Reich was only thirty-six at the time, a widow with two daughters. Only eight months before, she had lost her husband, a renowned musician, to cancer. The family had always lived in good circumstances and had no need for financial help even after the loss of their husband and father. But after his unexpected death, they struggled with a number of unanswered questions: Is there a purpose in life? Is there anything after death? And if so, what? Why are we born? Did we live before this life?

Representatives of a number of different religions approached them, trying to be of help. However, Sister Reich never felt a need for their assistance. The answers they offered were not new to her and not very helpful.

Let me make it clear that Sister Reich was a religious person. She loved to read, and the Bible was one of her favorite books. She was always seeking truth, even by study and faith. She believed firmly that Jesus is the Christ, and she taught her family to follow His teachings. They accepted Peter, Paul, Matthew, Mark, Luke, James, and John as Apostles and regarded their teachings highly. This family had always been happy. They were good, honest people, and even the loss of their husband and father could not take away their strong feeling of family.

However, when Sister Carmen Reich read the Book of Mormon cover to cover in two days, she felt something she had never before experienced. By her own account, it was “the spirit of revelation.” Her experience was consistent with Joseph Smith’s description of personal revelation; she said she could “feel pure intelligence flowing” into her, giving her “sudden strokes of ideas” about the things of the Spirit of God. These ideas related to her special circumstances. The Spirit was able to teach her, for she was open and receptive to truth and light. As the missionaries taught her the plan of salvation and the other doctrines of the Restoration, she continued to grow in the principle of personal revelation. All the good things she had learned in her Lutheran faith received a new and a deeper meaning, and all of a sudden life itself had a totally different and divine eternal perspective.

It was not that she felt any disdain for what she had believed for so many years. She still loved many of the hymns she had sung at church. One of her favorites was (and continues to be in our family) “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God,” by Martin Luther. She was also glad that she had learned to quote and internalize many key scriptures of the New
Testament. But when she heard the message of the Restoration, a door was opened into a world flooded with light and filled with love and hope. Looking back, she described her experience this way: It was as if something of great importance had been lifeless and inert but was now resurrected to life, beauty, and activity.

Sister Reich, my dear mother-in-law, represents in many ways the multitude of converts who are coming into the Church every day from other religions—both Christian and non-Christian, and even from no religion at all. One characteristic is true of all of them—they are willing and pure enough to believe when God speaks.

Sister Reich was baptized on November 7, 1954. In December, only a few weeks after her baptism, the missionary who baptized her asked if she would write down her testimony. Elder Jenkins wanted to use her testimony to help others feel the true spirit of conversion. Fortunately, he kept her handwritten original for more than forty years and then returned it to my mother-in-law as a very special gift of love. Sister Carmen Reich passed away in 2000 at age eighty-three.

Let me read to you parts of her written testimony. It shows what she saw, at this time of her life, as the key points of the Restoration. Please bear in mind that you are listening to a sister who was taught and had accepted the restored gospel only a few weeks earlier. Before the missionaries came, she had never heard anything about the Book of Mormon, and she knew nothing about Joseph Smith or Mormons in general. Also keep in mind that in 1954 there were no temples outside the United States except in Canada. And remember that Sister Reich had recently lost her husband. This is the English translation of her handwritten testimony:

Special characteristics of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints that are not present in other religious communities include, above all:

- Modern revelation given through the Prophet Joseph Smith.
- Sacred priesthood authority as in the time of Christ, with a living prophet today.
- Next, the Book of Mormon in its clear and pure language, with all its instructions and promises for the Church of Jesus Christ—truly a second witness with the Bible that Jesus Christ lives.
- Faith in a personal God—that is, God the Father; God the Son [Jesus Christ]; and the Holy Ghost, who facilitates prayer and guides us personally.
- Belief in a premortal life, the premortal existence. Knowledge of the purpose of our earthly life and of our life after death. The plan of salvation is so clearly laid out in the restored gospel that our lives receive new meaning and direction.
The Word of Wisdom as a guide to help us to keep our body and spirit healthy and improve them. This is our goal because we know that we will take our body up again after death.

Temple work, with its many sacred ordinances enabling families to be together forever. This doctrine, totally new to me, was given through revelation to the Prophet Joseph Smith.

How grateful I am for Sister Reich. How grateful I am for the missionaries. How grateful I am for the families who have prepared these missionaries. How grateful I am for the Restoration.

The key messages of the Restoration have the power to bring divine feelings to the heart and mind of the earnest seeker of truth, irrespective of the person’s cultural or religious background. There are no geographic or cultural boundaries for the Holy Ghost. The Holy Ghost is not restricted by space; neither is the Spirit restricted by time. We all have witnessed the power of the Spirit, and the scriptures testify of it: “[Jesus Christ] manifesteth himself unto all those who believe in him, by the power of the Holy Ghost; yea, unto every nation, kindred, tongue, and people” (2 Nephi 26:13).

My dear brothers and sisters, many of you have served as missionaries or have sent sons and daughters to lands and missions with names you might have never heard before and geographic locations you may have had a hard time finding on the world map. Thank you for this wonderful service of love. At the same time, may I invite you to take a good look into the future. Your children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren may be serving in countries and areas of the world with cultural and religious backgrounds totally different from your traditional mission fields. Your firm belief in and your willingness to testify of the Restoration today will prepare the ground for the successful service of future generations of missionaries. These future missionaries, prepared by you, will be a great blessing to individuals, to families, and to the peoples of the world.

As members of the Church of Jesus Christ, we have a responsibility to extend the message of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ, as guided by the Spirit, to every corner of the world. Sometimes this corner may be located in our own home—perhaps in our own family. And we have a special privilege and responsibility to prepare our youth for this service of love by building their personal testimonies. That responsibility should not overwhelm us. Let us be humbled by it but not overwhelmed.

It may be helpful to recall the Savior’s charge and the promises He gave to His disciples. They are still applicable to us today. Jesus said:
“Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world” (Matthew 28:19–20; emphasis added).

“Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem . . . and unto the uttermost part of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

You and I have the same responsibility and promise today. Members of the Church live in all parts of the world—sometimes in the uttermost parts of the earth. To one person, Germany may be the uttermost part. To someone from New York City, the uttermost part of the earth may be the town of Preston, Idaho. Or New York City may qualify as the uttermost part of the earth for those who have lived all their lives in Manti, Utah. Wherever we may be, we are expected to invite our neighbors, friends, and acquaintances to come, see, and experience what the restored gospel is all about. We can invite them to our homes and to our church meetings.

As members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, we invite people of all backgrounds—many of which are very different from our own—to come unto Christ. We should not hesitate to invite those of other religions. Many of these good people have been seeking for the truth, even by study and also by faith, for a long time. We need to reach out to them in a courageous way with a sweet boldness, with love, and with a pure desire to share the truth from which they have been kept “because they know not where to find it” (D&C 123:12).

President Gordon B. Hinckley said: “We do not stand out in opposition to other churches. We respect all men for all the good that they do, and we say to those of all churches, we honor the good that you do and we invite you to come and see what further good we can do for you.”

The Prophet Joseph Smith explained: “We don’t ask any people to throw away any good they have got; we only ask them to come and get more.”

President Howard W. Hunter quoted President George Albert Smith and then expanded on his words:

In our humble efforts to build brotherhood and to teach revealed truth, we say to the people of the world what President George Albert Smith so lovingly suggested:

“We have come not to take away from you the truth and virtue you possess. We have come not to find fault with you nor to criticize you. We have not come here to berate you because of things you have not done; but we have come here as your brethren . . . and to say to you:
‘Keep all the good that you have, and let us bring to you more good, in order that you may be happier and in order that you may be prepared to enter into the presence of our Heavenly Father.” (Sharing the Gospel with Others, comp. Preston Nibley [Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1948], pp. 12–13). . . .

Ours is a perennial religion based on eternal, saving truth. Its message of love and brotherhood is lodged in scripture and in the revelations of the Lord to his living prophet. It embraces all truth. It circumscribes all wisdom—all that God has revealed to man, and all that he will yet reveal.7

The Restoration in its fulness completes and enhances the truths found in the religions of the world.

Latter-day Saints are occasionally accused of being narrow-minded or unwilling to consider the beliefs of others. Such accusations may be true of Latter-day Saints who do not understand their own religion, but those who know the position of the Church regarding the beliefs of other people willingly allow all to “worship how, where, or what they may” (Articles of Faith 1:11).

In a conference address in 1921, Elder Orson F. Whitney described many religious leaders as being inspired. He said:

[God] is using not only his covenant people, but other peoples as well, to consummate a work, stupendous, magnificent, and altogether too arduous for this little handful of Saints to accomplish by and of themselves. . . .

All down the ages men bearing the authority of the Holy Priesthood—patriarchs, prophets, apostles and others, have officiated in the name of the Lord, doing the things that he required of them; and outside the [limits] of their activities other good and great men, not bearing the Priesthood, but possessing [depth] of thought, great wisdom, and a desire to uplift their fellows, have been sent by the Almighty into many nations, to give them, not the fulness of the Gospel, but that portion of truth that they were able to receive and wisely use.8

The First Presidency has clearly stated: “The great religious leaders of the world such as Mohammed, Confucius, and the Reformers, as well as philosophers including Socrates, Plato, and others, received a portion of God’s light. Moral truths were given to them by God to enlighten whole nations and to bring a higher level of understanding to individuals.”

The religion into which a person is born may be incomplete, but it can still serve as a foundation for the reception of the fulness of the gospel. We are wise when we show respect for the beliefs of others.

Just as we recognize and support the privilege of others to worship God Almighty according to their conscience, so we claim the right to declare our faith and our testimony of the restored gospel of Jesus
Christ according to our beliefs: “We talk of Christ, we rejoice in Christ, we preach of Christ, we prophesy of Christ, and we write according to our prophecies, that our children may know to what source they may look for a remission of their sins” (2 Nephi 25:26).

To share the message and the redemptive power of Christ and His Atonement with our friends and neighbors all over the world, we need to declare with courage and with clarity the events of 1820 and thereafter. These events and the revelation that attended them are what distinguish us from other religions and from any people with good intent.

The Restoration was foreseen by those with priesthood power and keys at the meridian of time. They understood why a restoration of truth and priesthood power would be necessary.

The Apostle Paul, writing from Corinth to the Saints in Thessalonica, prophesied: “Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him, that ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand. Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first” (2 Thessalonians 2:1–3).

If Paul knew that there would be a falling away, surely Jesus knew. But although Jesus knew that the church He established during His mortal ministry would be lost, He still established a divine pattern because He also knew that future generations would be able to recognize the very same priesthood authority and structure when it was restored centuries later.

Eusebius, a historian of the Christian church in the fourth century, wrote about this divine pattern: “Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, not very long after the commencement of his public ministry, elected the twelve, whom he called Apostles, by way of eminence over the rest of his disciples. He also appointed seventy others beside these, whom he sent, two and two, before him into every place and city whither he himself was about to go.”

And Eusebius, quoting Hegesippus, also wrote about a falling away: “When the sacred choir of apostles became extinct, and the generation of those that had been privileged to hear their inspired wisdom had passed away, then also the combinations of [immoral] error arose by the fraud and delusions of false teachers. . . . As there was none of the apostles left, henceforth [they] attempted, without shame, to preach their false doctrine against the gospel of truth.”

Without the Prophet Joseph, we would still be in this same state of confusion and darkness. Some fifteen hundred years after Eusebius,
Joseph found himself in the midst of a “war of words and tumult of opinions” about religion. He asked himself, “Who of all these parties are right. . . . If any one of them be right, which is it, and how shall I know it?” (Joseph Smith—History 1:10). Then he read James 1:5. And Joseph, this courageous fourteen-year-old, chose to “do as James directs, that is, ask of God” (Joseph Smith—History 1:13).

Joseph went into the woods near his family home to offer his first vocal prayer to God. He had barely begun to offer up the desires of his heart when a power of darkness so overcame him that he could not speak (see Joseph Smith—History 1:15). This was not an imaginary power but the power of some actual being from an unseen world trying to destroy him. Joseph later testified: “[After] exerting all my powers to call upon God . . . , I saw a pillar of light exactly over my head, above the brightness of the sun, which descended gradually until it fell upon me. . . . When the light rested upon me I saw two Personages, whose brightness and glory defy all description, standing above me in the air. One of them spake unto me, calling me by name and said, pointing to the other—This is My Beloved Son. Hear Him!” (Joseph Smith—History 1:16–17; emphasis in original).

From that day forward, the heavens were open again. Joseph learned line upon line, precept upon precept. He studied the scriptures, and he communed with angels. Apostles and prophets from ancient times came to confer on him sacred priesthood authority and keys. Heavenly messengers taught him the ordinances of everlasting life and the mysteries of the kingdom of God. Revelation flowed from on high.

Evidences of this revelation are many. Among them is the Book of Mormon, which Joseph Smith translated by the gift and power of God. Through him the Church of Jesus Christ was established again on the earth with the same structure and the same priesthood authority the Lord’s Church had anciently.

In a revelation given in 1831, the Lord stated the reasons for this Restoration:

Wherefore, I the Lord, knowing the calamity which should come upon the inhabitants of the earth, called upon my servant Joseph Smith, Jun., and spake unto him from heaven, and gave him commandments;

And also gave commandments to others, that they should proclaim these things unto the world. . . .

That faith also might increase in the earth;
That mine everlasting covenant might be established;
That the fulness of my gospel might be proclaimed by the weak and the simple unto the ends of the world. (D&C 1:17–18, 21–23)
Having the fulness of the gospel should not lead any of us to feel arrogant or harbor a holier-than-thou attitude. We should simply be grateful with all our hearts for the truth restored and for the privilege of bringing this truth and these eternal blessings to our brothers and sisters.

What a great time to live in! We are living in the dispensation of the fulness of times. The gospel of Jesus Christ has been restored. Future generations will look upon you with gratitude and appreciation for how you used your opportunities.

Do not fear! Trust the Lord! Be courageous! Seek learning! Have faith!

Brothers and sisters, let us never be ashamed to testify of this wonderful Restoration, the restored gospel of Jesus Christ, “for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth” (Romans 1:16).

Let us never be ashamed to testify that Joseph Smith was a true prophet of God and that we have a living prophet today.

The keys of the kingdom of God have been restored again, and they are held by Apostles of the Lord Jesus Christ. The President of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, who is the senior Apostle, holds all the keys necessary to preside over all the organizational and ordinance work of the Church. President Gordon B. Hinckley has this authority today. He stands as the prophet of God—the most recent in an unbroken succession of prophets and Apostles from Joseph Smith to our own day. This is my apostolic witness of the reality of the Restoration and the truthfulness of this great work.

May God bless you and your loved ones, today and always, I pray, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

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Notes

3. Smith, History of the Church, 3:381.
These Easter conferences have been wonderful, and today’s is no exception. After accepting the invitation to speak, I began to think earnestly about what I might contribute to this remarkable program. As I reviewed the outstanding list of faculty and topics for today’s conference and those of previous years, I concluded that my participation likely could not add much, with the possible exception of one consideration. I hope I might assist in our quest today by fulfilling my responsibility as a witness of the reality of the Resurrection and all events associated with it.

As you know, my calling as a Seventy is to “preach the gospel” and to be a witness of Jesus Christ (see D&C 107:25). Although my scholarship, such as it is, is largely in arenas far from the expertise of our speakers and the topics of today’s presentations, my testimony is not distanced from them and is, I believe, germane to the Easter season.

In this regard, I would like to begin by relating some autobiographical learning events that have affected me significantly and seem appropriate to share. I shall not dwell on details, nor shall I mention other profound personal and sacred experiences that are vital to my having a firm testimony and an unreserved witness of the Lord Jesus Christ. Let me just assure you that what I know, I know clearly and more reliably than the many things that I have learned or understood through traditional study, experimentation in the laboratory, and life experiences.
I confess that I have always had a testimony of Jesus Christ and His mission. I have wondered about many things, but the reality of the Savior has never been one of those. The Brethren used to talk about believing blood more than they do today. Having been something of a geneticist for a period of my academic career, I believe that I largely inherited my believing blood, together with growing up in a supportive environment, and am grateful for that heritage, which has made much of my life so much easier.

As I have tried to analyze my testimony and what has strengthened it, I have concluded that study, faith, and obedience are critical to obtaining and sustaining a testimony, but there is something more. Let me attempt to explain what I mean by relating some personal experiences.

The first occurred some thirty years ago. By then, I was a returned missionary and had had several Church leadership experiences. I was young, but I was not really a rookie. As a stake president, I had chosen to speak about spiritual gifts in a stake conference because some questions had arisen on this topic among a few members of our stake. While I was speaking, I read these verses from the forty-sixth section of the Doctrine and Covenants: “For all have not every gift given unto them; for there are many gifts, and to every man is given a gift by the Spirit of God. To some is given one, and to some is given another, that all may be profited thereby. To some it is given by the Holy Ghost to know that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and that he was crucified for the sins of the world” (vv. 11–13).

As I read that last verse, “To some it is given by the Holy Ghost to know that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and that he was crucified for the sins of the world,” it came to me, with greater power than I had ever experienced, that I had been given that gift. It was not that I had not previously had a conviction about Jesus Christ and His unique and supernal role, because I had, as I have mentioned. It was the dramatic realization, confirmed by the Holy Ghost, that I indeed had this specific gift, which is not the routine possession of everyone else. I have never forgotten that moment.

The second experience followed just months after the first. My wife, Sharon, and I, with some good friends, had the privilege of going to Israel. We had a great time and visited most of the special and expected sites throughout the Holy Land. When we visited the Garden Tomb, we were not alone and, in fact, found ourselves in a long line waiting for our turn to look into the burial vault.

Our guide and the caretaker at the tomb was a retired British army colonel who was tall, slender, and ramrod-straight in his demeanor.
He was serving as a missionary for another denomination from England and clearly was a committed Christian with a well-developed sense of propriety and reverence. He asked for people to be respectful of this sacred site and to keep voices low because there were those in the area praying and meditating.

Just ahead of us in the line were a couple of American women with accents that made me think they were from a borough in our largest American city. They loudly commented about how much time the line was taking and how it was interfering with their planned shopping. The guide said nothing to them directly but was clearly a little irritated by them, and we were embarrassed by our fellow countrywomen. Their dialogue continued almost nonstop until they finally reached the opening of the tomb. The first one there said, “Why, Ethel, there is nothing in here!” Our wonderful British caretaker said with admirable restraint, “Madam, that is precisely the point!” My witness of the reality of the Resurrection was again clearly, but quietly and personally, confirmed for me that day.

Many, including those of other Christian faiths, believe in the Resurrection and the divinity of Jesus Christ. However, it is a special blessing to know that He is the Christ, the Savior and the Redeemer, and that He lives today.

The third experience I will relate occurred in the fall of 1997. I was serving as the Europe North Area President and living in England. One day I received a very nice letter from the Divinity School at the University of Nottingham inviting me to participate in a seminar series on “alternative religions.” In an evening session each month, this group of clerics and graduate students in the ministry would invite a leader from another religious tradition to spend two hours with them. The format they suggested was that I might say anything I wished for the first half hour, and then the remaining hour and a half would be devoted to a question-and-answer session both on what was said and what they had previously read or wondered about. In other words, it would be open season!

My first inclination, candidly, was to think of whom else I might send to respond to this invitation. I add parenthetically that for a number of years, Nottingham University had been quite friendly to Latter-day Saints. Professor Douglas Davies had, until just a year or two before, been at Nottingham, and several of our British Church Educational System personnel had obtained graduate degrees in his program. By then, he had moved north to Durham University. For all the obvious reasons, I felt that I needed to respond and appear.
Accordingly, I arrived at the appointed time and place on campus and was treated quite graciously. As I entered the modest classroom, quite bleak by BYU standards, I noted that several of the approximately forty in attendance had missionary copies of the Book of Mormon on their desks with their Bibles and other papers. Several of the copies of the Book of Mormon had little yellow Post-it notes marking selected pages and passages. I sensed I was in for some serious discussion. I also had my scriptures, but my Bible was different from theirs. All that I saw on their tables were fairly recent revision or translation editions, and mine was the only King James Version I could see.

You can imagine much of what transpired. I took the first thirty minutes in telling them a little of our history, beginning with the First Vision, the visitations of the angel Moroni, the restoration of the priesthood, the translation of the Book of Mormon, the organization of the Church, and, briefly, our Church history in Great Britain. They listened courteously, most took some notes, and all waited patiently for the question-and-answer period. Virtually all seemed to know something about us, and I sensed they were serious in their desire to understand.

Their initial questions were kind and respectful and related to such things as their wonderment that my professional training was not in religion or theology, given my Church leadership assignment; that Latter-day Saints were so willing to respond to mission calls; and that we had really abandoned plural marriage—or had we?

Soon we got into doctrinal matters that focused on Latter-day Saint beliefs in continuing revelation, an open canon of scripture, a lay priesthood, and similar matters. We also discussed why Latter-day Saints do not accept the creeds and councils of other traditions and why we also believe an apostasy took place.

Several had marked the Book of Mormon passages that suggest that the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are “one God.” They read to me the words of Abinadi in chapter 15 of Mosiah and wondered aloud if Abinadi did not actually believe in the Catholic Trinity. We talked of the Savior’s great Intercessory Prayer recorded in John 17 and other clarifying passages. It was clear that they thought my interpretation was quaint, but one opined that he could understand my confusion. We do not have time today to relate all of their questions in detail, but the discourse and our discussion were respectful, cordial, and rather wide ranging.

Then in the last half hour, we finally got to the question that I should have been expecting. It went something like this: In light of the many differences you and we have identified between your beliefs and ours, how do you justify calling yourselves Christians?
Because I had been so conditioned in our Latter-day Saint culture, I honestly thought that I had already spent an hour explaining our belief in Jesus Christ and His centrality to our theology and religious practice. At the moment of my growing frustration, I was helped by heaven in a way that had not occurred to me previously. I felt a spirit of calmness and comfort as a response to them formed within me.

I had already mentioned to the group my high regard for the King James Version and my appreciation for the role of England and its courageous reformers who made the Bible readily available to all of us. We had discussed our divergent views on the current utility of the King James Version and also the Joseph Smith Translation, which they described as curious.

Wanting to avoid any of these issues or distractions in my response to their central question, I asked our discussion leader if I might borrow his Bible to use in answering the question. He readily handed it to me. I then asked the group if I might answer the question posed to me by asking them a few brief questions first. They nodded in agreement.

I lifted a red-covered International Translation and, without opening it, asked if they accepted it as the word of God. Again, they nodded in assent.

I then asked three questions, asking them to answer only to themselves unless they wished to vocalize a response. The first was, “Do you accept your Bible’s version of the origins of Jesus Christ?” Some looked a little puzzled, and so I amplified by asking, “Do you believe that He was literally the physical Son of God the Father and Mary, a mortal mother?” Some nodded yes, some looked down, and some looked pained. I then told them that we, as Latter-day Saints, accept this biblical teaching without reservation.

The second question was, “Do you accept your Bible’s account of Jesus’s mortal ministry? This includes the miracles that He performed and the organization of His Church with Apostles having His authority to minister and administrate.” Again, I noticed the same general spectrum of mute responses as with the first question. As with the first query, my answer was the same: we accept the biblical account without qualification. We then had a brief aside on the Lord’s miracles, and several admitted to being unsettled as to their literal veracity.

The third question was then presented: “Do you accept your Bible’s account of Christ’s Passion [to use a term more familiar to them than to us], His experience in the Garden of Gethsemane, His Crucifixion on Golgotha, and His literal Resurrection on the third day?” A few remained passive, but several of the group now needed to speak.
Interestingly, the most agitated wanted to talk about the Resurrection as being only symbolic of new life such as in the spring when the flowers and trees come out and blossom.

It was obvious that many were troubled by the thought of a literal resurrection, and a couple of them even expressed doubts about individual life after death. After a few minutes of various opinions, I replied that we as Latter-day Saints fully accept the biblical account of the Resurrection of Jesus.

I further bore my testimony of its truthfulness and then asked my last question. “Given the answers to the questions I have just posed, who do you think deserves to be called Christian?” Again, there were various looks and no comments except from one graduate student who elbowed the previously vocal fellow next to her who had asked the question concerning our Christianity and said, “It looks like he got you there.”

The time was up, and the moderator took back the floor with gracious expressions of thanks and best wishes. Several of the attendees made civil and generous comments, although I am not aware that anyone’s previous convictions were altered. Three or four of the group lingered for a few minutes longer and expressed appreciation for our evening together as they had not understood how strongly we feel about the Savior. I do not tell this experience to be critical or to make light of the feelings and beliefs of these good people. I believe they were doing the best they could with the understanding that was theirs. I left them with increased appreciation for their general goodness. I also felt increased gratitude for the Holy Ghost and for my sustaining testimony of the Savior.

Two of them accepted my invitation to attend the open house for the new Preston England Temple, then under construction. At the visit to the temple open house, both of these new friends went out of their way to mention the clear evidence they saw in the artwork and other materials of our strong feelings about Jesus Christ.

I have not been invited to any of their baptisms into the restored Church, nor do I think that this has occurred. I do believe that what was most impressive and surprising to them about us and our theology is our testimony of the Savior.

Just last Sunday, I was introduced to an investigator who had come to the general session of stake conference where I was assigned. As we visited briefly, she asked if I was going to talk about Palm Sunday, it being Palm Sunday. I responded and told her I indeed planned to speak about the Savior and some of the events related to His Atonement, Crucifixion, and Resurrection. She seemed somewhat relieved.
and reported that someone had told her that we do not worship the same Jesus others do. I told her that we worship the Living Christ and that she would hear several testimonies in music and talks that would demonstrate our convictions about and reverence for Him. That turned out to be the case, and I was grateful that it was so.

It did remind me of an experience of almost eight years ago. At that time, we were holding the open-house tours for the recently completed Preston England Temple immediately prior to the dedication services scheduled for a couple of weeks hence. One of our tour supervisors approached me with some anxiety and said that a known critic and antagonist of the Church was in one of the tour groups and that the guide of that group was a fine man but also a fairly recent convert with limited speaking and leadership experience. The plea to me was to go with the group and rescue him. Accordingly, I found the group and lingered near the back where I could observe all that transpired and hopefully render some assistance to our guide if necessary.

It was not long before the outspoken opponent tried to take over the tour. Our guide was doing a fine job and was explaining the centrality of Jesus Christ to our theology. The critic interrupted and said something like, “How do you claim to be Christians and you don’t even celebrate Holy Week?” Happily, I restrained myself and just listened. Our sweet guide, seemingly unruffled, just said, “Why sir, every week for us is Holy Week. Each Sabbath day we meet to partake of the sacred emblems of the sacrament, where we promise to always remember Him, to keep His commandments, and plead to always have His Spirit to be with us.” I thought that this was a splendid answer.

Unfortunately, the critic was not mollified, and he said, “Well, you don’t celebrate Good Friday like real Christians.” Our wonderful new Latter-day Saint guide then said, “For us, the day Jesus died was Bad Friday, and we give our attention to the day He was resurrected: Good Sunday, or Easter.” Another terrific answer. The man stayed a while longer but didn’t ask this great group leader any more questions.

As we moved through the temple and were introduced to the baptistry and then the other sacred rooms and spaces, it seemed to me that there was a special spirit this good man brought to all of his clear and thoughtful responses to sincere questions that were asked. He concluded with a brief but touching testimony of Jesus Christ and the Restoration. I hope for all of us that each week is Holy Week and that we recognize what a privilege it is to celebrate “Good Sunday,” or the Resurrection of the Lord.

As I have reflected on these experiences and others that I might relate, I have found new understanding in the words of the Prophet...
Joseph, who said: “The fundamental principles of our religion are the testimony of the Apostles and Prophets, concerning Jesus Christ, that He died, was buried, and rose again the third day, and ascended into heaven; and all other things which pertain to our religion are only appendages to it.”

Joseph Smith might have said that the fundamental principles of our religion are the facts or evidence concerning Jesus Christ, and I might not have initially appreciated any difference. But he did not choose those or other similar words. He said that the testimonies of the apostles and prophets concerning Jesus Christ provide the fundamental principles of our religion. I would likewise suggest that our own testimonies concerning Jesus Christ provide the basis of what is most dear to us.

Please do not misunderstand. Scholarship is essential and provides the framework to establish and protect our understanding of the unique mission and contributions of the Lord Jesus Christ. Without serious scholarship into the life and ministry of the Lord, our testimonies may be in peril or never established in the first instance. But scholarship alone does not provide the assurance that can come only from the true witness of the Holy Ghost. In fact, the nature of scholarship or research is that its conclusions are always tentative or incomplete, awaiting the next discovery, insight, or data. It is the testimony of Jesus, the spirit of prophecy (see Revelation 19:10), that brings full and unreserved confidence to our witness of Him.

We of all people welcome more knowledge and insight, but we also do not confuse even more robust understanding with the absolute conviction that can come only through the still, small voice whispered by the Holy Spirit. Thus, the testimonies of apostles and prophets, as well as our personal testimonies, are what cause us to be able to say without equivocation or reservation that Jesus is the Christ, our Savior and Redeemer, the Firstborn of the Father in the spirit world, and His Only Begotten Son in this mortal sphere.

That is why the fifteen living Apostles chose to share their testimonies in the wonderful document dated January 1, 2000, and entitled “The Living Christ: The Testimony of the Apostles, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.” They might have written books, indeed several have, that outlined the basis for their faith, understanding, and scholarship about Jesus. Interestingly, they decided to record their testimonies in thirteen brief paragraphs held to one page that also includes room for all fifteen signatures. Let me share again what they have written. I commend it to you as I bear my testimony of it and of Him:
The Living Christ

As we commemorate the birth of Jesus Christ two millennia ago, we offer our testimony of the reality of His matchless life and the infinite virtue of His great atoning sacrifice. None other has had so profound an influence upon all who have lived and will yet live upon the earth.

He was the Great Jehovah of the Old Testament, the Messiah of the New. Under the direction of His Father, He was the creator of the earth. “All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made” (John 1:3). Though sinless, He was baptized to fulfill all righteousness. He “went about doing good” (Acts 10:38), yet was despised for it. His gospel was a message of peace and goodwill. He entreated all to follow His example. He walked the roads of Palestine, healing the sick, causing the blind to see, and raising the dead. He taught the truths of eternity, the reality of our premortal existence, the purpose of our life on earth, and the potential for the sons and daughters of God in the life to come.

He instituted the sacrament as a reminder of His great atoning sacrifice. He was arrested and condemned on spurious charges, convicted to satisfy a mob, and sentenced to die on Calvary’s cross. He gave His life to atone for the sins of all mankind. His was a great vicarious gift in behalf of all who would ever live upon the earth.

We solemnly testify that His life, which is central to all human history, neither began in Bethlehem nor concluded on Calvary. He was the Firstborn of the Father, the Only Begotten Son in the flesh, the Redeemer of the world.

He rose from the grave to “become the firstfruits of them that slept” (1 Corinthians 15:20). As Risen Lord, He visited among those He had loved in life. He also ministered among His “other sheep” (John 10:16) in ancient America. In the modern world, He and His Father appeared to the boy Joseph Smith, ushering in the long-promised “dispensation of the fulness of times” (Ephesians 1:10).

Of the Living Christ, the Prophet Joseph wrote: “His eyes were as a flame of fire; the hair of his head was white like the pure snow; his countenance shone above the brightness of the sun; and his voice was as the sound of the rushing of great waters, even the voice of Jehovah, saying:

“I am the first and the last; I am he who liveth, I am he who was slain; I am your advocate with the Father” (D&C 110:3–4).

Of Him the Prophet also declared: “And now, after the many testimonies which have been given of him, this is the testimony, last of all, which we give of him: That he lives!

“For we saw him, even on the right hand of God; and we heard the voice bearing record that he is the Only Begotten of the Father—

“That by him, and through him, and of him, the worlds are and were created, and the inhabitants thereof are begotten sons and daughters unto God” (D&C 76:22–24).
We declare in words of solemnity that His priesthood and His Church have been restored upon the earth—“built upon the foundation of . . . apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone” (Ephesians 2:20).

We testify that He will someday return to earth. “And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together” (Isaiah 40:5). He will rule as King of Kings and reign as Lord of Lords, and every knee shall bend and every tongue shall speak in worship before Him. Each of us will stand to be judged of Him according to our works and the desires of our hearts.

We bear testimony, as His duly ordained Apostles—that Jesus is the Living Christ, the immortal Son of God. He is the great King Immanuel, who stands today on the right hand of His Father. He is the light, the life, and the hope of the world. His way is the path that leads to happiness in this life and eternal life in the world to come. God be thanked for the matchless gift of His divine Son.

Now, this is the wonderful, moving, and affirmative testimony of the First Presidency and the Twelve. We understand that their testimonies are of special significance because these fifteen men are “special witnesses” (see D&C 107:23). For many in the world, including some who are striving for testimonies themselves, the witness of the Apostles is essential because these seeking people are the “others [to whom] it is given to believe on their words [meaning their testimony of Jesus Christ], that they also might have eternal life if they continue faithful” (D&C 46:14).

I suppose some might think that because the scripture teaches that “To some it is given by the Holy Ghost to know that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and that he was crucified for the sins of the world” (D&C 46:13; emphasis added), this must be an exclusive or restricted gift, perhaps even akin to the sectarian notion of predestination to salvation or damnation. Nothing could be further from the truth. While acquiring the testimony of Jesus may be easier for some than others, it is also abundantly clear that God wishes every person to have this witness and conviction personally.

Think of these remarkable words of counsel and promise given for our time in November 1831:

Wherefore, I the Lord, knowing the calamity which should come upon the inhabitants of the earth, called upon my servant Joseph Smith, Jun., and spake unto him from heaven, and gave him commandments;
And also gave commandments to others, that they should proclaim these things unto the world; and all this that it might be fulfilled, which was written by the prophets—
The weak things of the world shall come forth and break down the mighty and strong ones, that man should not counsel his fellow man, neither trust in the arm of flesh—
But that every man might speak in the name of God the Lord, even the Savior of the world; That faith also might increase in the earth. (D&C 1:17–21; emphasis added)

What a wonderful thing it would be if every man and woman could have the strength and conviction of their witness that they could confidently testify of truth in the name of the Savior! What a worthy goal for each of us and for each person that we have the occasion to touch and strengthen!

Each of us who has a testimony of Jesus as the Christ has a heavy and great responsibility to live our lives so that our conduct will match our convictions. As I bear again my witness of the literal, living reality of the resurrected Savior in our day, I also pray that we will do all we can to build the testimonies of Jesus Christ in all with whom we are privileged to interact. Thanks to all of you who so magnificently and effectively testify of your knowledge and love of the Lord by the goodness of your example and precepts. This is His work, and He does watch over Israel. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

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Notes

John S. Tanner, academic vice president of BYU

Photo courtesy of Mark A. Philbrick
Welcome to Easter Conference, the third in what I hope will be an enduring BYU tradition. This conference is held on the Saturday before Easter, a day that is typically treated by Latter-day Saints—who lack the tradition of Holy Week or Good Friday—as a weekend holiday for chores or recreation. This year the conference also happens to fall on April 15, tax day, the day when Americans respond to the edict of our empire that “all the world should be taxed” (Luke 2:1). I hope this conference will help you meditate for a morning on the Mediator rather than on mammon, that it will provide a measure of spiritual re-creation to supplement your recreation, and that it will help transform a holiday weekend into a holy-day weekend. I thank in advance all those who will contribute to these ends.

The occasion of our holding an Easter conference on tax day reminds me of an Easter weekend almost four hundred years ago. On Good Friday in 1613, the poet John Donne found himself riding from London westward toward Wales on a business trip. Traditionally, Good Friday is a day when the Christian world remembers the Crucifixion. It is a holy day in the Christian calendar, a solemn time when Christians are supposed to set aside worldly affairs, go to church, fast, pray, and reflect on the Savior’s suffering and death. Instead, Donne devoted Good Friday in 1613 to his business obligations rather than to his religious duties. This circumstance became the occasion of one of the finest devotional poems in English entitled “Good Friday, 1613: Riding Westward.”

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In the poem, Donne laments, “I am carried towards the West / This day, when my soul’s form bends toward the East.” Then, he engages in a complex but moving meditation on the Crucifixion. Donne travels in his mind from Wales back across the miles and the years to the foot of the cross. He can scarcely bear to look upon the agony there, as he imagines the Son of God “humbled below us.” Donne sees in his mind “those hands, which [once] span[ned] the poles, / And tun[ed the] spheres,” now “pierced with those holes”; “that blood,” which is the source of eternal life, “made dirt of dust”; and “that flesh which was worn / By God for his apparel, ragg’d, and torn.” Such a spectacle “made [Christ’s] own lieutenant, Nature, shrink; / It made his footstool crack, and the sun wink.” How then can Donne look upon Christ’s face in agony? How can he watch his God die? Yet Donne forces himself to turn his imagined gaze up to Christ’s face on the cross. As he does so, he imagines the Savior turning His gaze upon him, John Donne, a scandalously sinful man who, like Augustine, was notorious as a young man for having been often carried by “pleasure or business” westward into worldly ways when his soul should have inclined eastward toward the Savior. There follows this stunning conclusion, in which the poet pleads to be purified:

Though these things, as I ride, be from mine eye,
They are present yet unto my memory,
For that looks towards them; and thou look’st towards me,
O Savior, as thou hang’st upon the tree.
I turn my back to thee but to receive
Corrections, till thy mercies bid thee leave.
O think me worth thine anger; punish me;
Burn off my rusts and my deformity;
Restore thine image so much, by thy grace,
That thou may’st know me, and I’ll turn my face.

Brothers and sisters, like Donne, all of us need the Savior to burn off the stains and rusts we accumulate in mortality. And we, too, must look to Christ to re-form by grace what we have de-formed by sin. May this hope for wholeness point our westward-wandering souls eastward toward a garden, a cross, and an empty tomb.

When we experience the purifying power of the Atonement, we may feel to exclaim with Enos, “Lord, how is it done?” (Enos 1:7). I know of no more compelling theological question in scripture than this. I want to give some perspective on this question today. Now, I do not claim to fully comprehend the awesome arithmetic of the Atonement by which one man’s death adds up to life for all men and by which
a guiltless man’s suffering cancels the guilt of all the penitent who come unto Him. Like Enos, I often wonder, “Lord, how is it done?”

Even so, I believe that scripture provides a remarkably intimate glimpse into the mechanics of mediation—that is, into how it is done—in its descriptions of Christ as our advocate and high priest. Scripture allows us to overhear the Son pleading our cause to the Father. It invites us to enter into the heavenly Holy of Holies, where God dwells with our great high priest and where every day is a Day of Atonement. The scriptures we will consider provide sacred glimpses into how it is done. So on this Saturday before Easter, let us mentally doff the shoes from off our feet and enter into the sanctuary where our salvation is wrought.

Traditionally, Christ is thought to have combined the three Old Testament offices of prophet, priest, and king. This triplet will be familiar to Latter-day Saints from the hymn “I Know That My Redeemer Lives,” which appeared in the first Church hymnal: “He lives, my Prophet, Priest, and King.” As prophet, Christ is our teacher and exemplar whose words and actions reveal God’s word to the world. As king, Christ is our ruler, judge, lawgiver, and Lord, into whose hands the Father has given the government of His kingdom. As priest, Christ is our redeemer, mediator, intercessor, and advocate with the Father, making a blood sacrifice that enables us to be cleansed from sin.

Note that I subsume the role of advocate under the role of priest. I believe that this is consistent with scripture, particularly modern revelation. Modern revelation expands and greatly develops our understanding of Christ as advocate. Jesus is called advocate only once in the New Testament. This occurs in 1 John 2:1: “My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.” Christ is alluded to as advocate many times in modern revelation. Modern revelation also clarifies even the verse in 1 John. The Joseph Smith Translation for this verse makes clear that Christ specifically acts as advocate for those who “sin and repent.”

 Advocate denotes not merely a lawyer but literally one who speaks for us. The word comes from the Latin ad vocare, “to speak for.” First John 2:1 employs the Greek parakletos, which connotes one who is at our side, sometimes translated as “our helper.” The same Greek term is used for the Holy Ghost in His role as comforter. The idea here is that Christ is by our side, as our helper and our defender; He speaks in our behalf.

The fullest and most intimate description of Christ as advocate in modern revelation occurs in Doctrine and Covenants 45:3–5. I have
come to regard this passage much as I do Doctrine and Covenants 19:15–20, in which the Savior recounts His atoning sacrifice, “Which suffering caused myself, even God, . . . to tremble because of pain.” Both passages are remarkably intimate, first-person descriptions by the Savior of the Atonement. In Doctrine and Covenants 45, the Savior describes His sacred, saving interaction with the Father: “Listen to him who is the advocate with the Father, who is pleading your cause before him—saying: Father, behold the sufferings and death of him who did no sin, in whom thou wast well pleased; behold the blood of thy Son which was shed, the blood of him whom thou gavest that thyself might be glorified; Wherefore, Father, spare these my brethren that believe on my name, that they may come unto me and have everlasting life” (vv. 3–5). So many things are noteworthy about this passage. I will mention several.

1. Note the present tense: Christ is pleading our cause—this is His constant, ongoing activity before the Father. Likewise, He points to His suffering, death, and blood as if they were present for the Father’s contemplation: “behold the sufferings,” “behold the . . . death.” As in Donne’s poem, it is as if the Son and the Father are reliving the great agony in the garden and on the cross in an eternal present. In his discussion of this idea, Elder Neal A. Maxwell notes the “ongoingness” of Christ’s atoning advocacy for us.

2. Note the emphasis: it falls almost entirely on the Savior’s redemptive suffering and only minimally on our actions. He asks the Father to spare us based on His merits, not on ours. We have a part to play in this divine drama of salvation, to be sure. Our role is briefly acknowledged in the wording of those “that believe on my name.” But what we must do—believe—seems so small, insignificant, and disproportionate compared to what must be done for us that it is almost embarrassing. We, as believers, are the beneficiaries of the Son’s suffering and death, His perfect life, and His shed blood—not to mention the Father’s sacrifice in giving such a Son to be so treated for the sake of our salvation.

3. Note the word wherefore—surely there is not a more crucial wherefore in all scripture than that in verse five. It links the Son’s suffering to an appeal to the Father to spare us. This simple causal conjunction denotes the reason the Father should consider this appeal. The hopes of every believer hinge upon this wherefore.

4. Note that Jesus calls us, familiarly, “my brethren.” Of course, Latter-day Saints know that this is literally true—we are all spiritual sons and daughters of God. Christ is the firstborn and therefore our eldest brother. Nevertheless, in context, this does not sound like a mere
Christ, Our Advocate and High Priest

statement of fact. Rather, it sounds here as if Christ were reminding the Father of His kinship with us, as if we were coequal siblings rather than utterly dependent petitioners. Jesus does not have to designate us “my brethren.” He could just as well name us “these poor sinners” or even “these thy children.” Instead, He expresses solidarity with fallen humanity—with us!—in the words “these my brethren.” What a condescending, merciful, gracious phrase! Here is an advocate who loves us, even though He knows full well our weaknesses, for He has taken upon Himself our infirmities. Here is an advocate who knows how to succor us. As the Lord says in Doctrine and Covenants 62:1, “Behold, and hearken, O ye elders of my church, saith the Lord your God, even Jesus Christ, your advocate, who knoweth the weakness of man and how to succor them who are tempted.”

5. Note that He pleads for grace for those “that believe on my name” (present tense) in order “that they may come unto me” (future tense): the first relative clause describes the present condition of the redeemed—they are believers. The second anticipates their future conditions—as those who have been forgiven and are thus enabled to come unto Him and inherit eternal life. As our advocate, Christ pleads not only for our forgiveness or justification but ultimately for our sanctification. His intercession thus both spares us from punishment and enables us to come unto Him and have eternal life. It opens the door for at-one-ment with Father and Son.

6. Finally, note that both here and elsewhere in scripture, Christ is always portrayed as our advocate with the Father. In some ways, the relationship between the Son and Father is the most surprising and potentially puzzling feature of the doctrine of Christ as advocate. What is the role of the Father in relation to Christ as advocate? Is the Father to be considered our accuser, who stands in opposition to our advocate? No, this role belongs to Satan (see Revelation 12:10). The very word devil (diabolos) means “accuser or slanderer.” If the Father is not our accuser, is He then a stern, just judge who must be placated by a Son who advocates for mercy? Yes and no. The scriptures sometimes suggest this, as in Doctrine and Covenants 109 when Joseph prays that the Father “wilt turn away thy wrath when thou lookest upon the face of thine Anointed” (v. 53). Scripture contains several similar passages that could lead us to attribute mercy and justice to separate members of the Godhead. But surely it would be a mistake to imagine that the Father embodies merely justice and vengeance while the Son embodies exclusively mercy and compassion. Just as the Son is both our merciful advocate and our just judge, so the Father possesses in Himself the
qualities of both justice and mercy in perfect fullness. One member of the Godhead is not more merciful or just than the other. To the extent that Christ acts as our advocate for mercy with His Father, He summons forth mercy that already exists in His Father’s heart.

But I think there is yet another way of looking at this divine drama between the advocate Son and His Father. I believe that as our advocate *with the Father*, Christ is not so much placating a wrathful God as He is claiming His rights under the covenant—the new covenant—to redeem those who repent. This covenant and these rights are predicated on the blood of one who “did no sin.” Through the Atonement, Jesus earned a place at “the right hand of God,” as Mormon says, “to claim of the Father his rights of mercy . . . ; wherefore he advocateth the cause of the children of men” (Moroni 7:27–28). Likewise, as Jesus tells the Prophet Joseph Smith, “I am Christ, and . . . by the virtue of the blood which I have spilt, have I pleaded before the Father for them” (D&C 38:4). As advocate, Jesus claims His rights of mercy with the Father, which He earned by virtue of the blood He spilt for us.

This is the way I read the extraordinary first-person glimpse we get from Doctrine and Covenants 45 into the Savior’s role as our advocate *with the Father*. In effect, Christ is saying to His Father, “Behold the fearful price that has been paid for salvation; wherefore spare these my beloved brothers and sisters who believe in me so that they may become one with us and receive eternal life.”

As advocate, Christ intercedes for us as our great high priest. He prays to the Father “for them . . . which shall believe on me” (John 17:20): “Sanctify them through thy truth: . . . that they may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they may also be one in us . . . that they may be made perfect in one” (John 17:17, 21, 23). Advocate and priest are both intercessory and mediatorial priestly offices.

Let me now speak briefly about the Savior’s role as high priest. This is described most fully, of course, in the Epistle to the Hebrews. In fact, it forms the controlling idea of Paul’s epistle. Paul recognized that the high priest who entered into the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement was but a “shadow of heavenly things” (Hebrews 8:5). In New Testament times, once a year the high priest entered the Holy of Holies in the temple with a censer of incense to make a blood offering that would cleanse the people from sin. Paul explains that, similarly, as high priest, Christ has entered the Holy of Holies in heaven through the offering of His own blood. He combines in Himself, as it were, the role of both priest and sacrificial animal: “Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place,
having obtained eternal redemption for us” (Hebrews 9:12). “For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us” (Hebrews 9:24).

But this is not all. Not only has Christ entered a heavenly Holy of Holies for us but also He has made it possible for us to enter too. In ancient Israel, only the high priest could pass through the second veil into this inner sanctuary where stood the mercy seat. Christ’s atoning sacrifice has opened the sanctuary of God to all believers. Paul says that Christ opened unto us “a new and living way” (Hebrews 10:20), through the veil of His own flesh and blood, whereby we can enter the holiest place. “Therefore, brethren,” Paul goes on to say, let us have “boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus” (Hebrews 10:19).

This understanding of Christ as our great high priest and advocate offers stunning, sweet, and hopeful doctrine. It has caused me to pray more earnestly of late for forgiveness through the atoning blood of Christ. I have echoed in my devotions the prayers of the people of Benjamin: “O have mercy, and apply the atoning blood of Christ that we may receive forgiveness of our sins, and our hearts may be purified; for we believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God” (Mosiah 4:2).

I have imagined the Savior, as advocate and high priest, coming before the Father to plead for me. How grateful I have felt to have such an advocate, “who knoweth the weakness of man and how to succor them who are tempted” (D&C 62:1). Likewise, I take comfort in Paul’s descriptions of Christ as high priest, who “took not on him the nature of angels” but was “made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful . . . high priest. . . . For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted” (Hebrews 2:16–18). Consequently, He “can have compassion on . . . them that are out of the way; for he himself also is compassed with infirmity” (Hebrews 5:2). This knowledge ought to embolden us to come to the Father’s throne: “For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:15–16).

I began with quoting a great seventeenth-century religious poet. Let me end with another: John Milton. At the end of Paradise Lost, Milton beautifully describes the Son acting in the priestly office as intercessor and advocate in behalf of fallen Adam and Eve, who have just offered a heartfelt, penitent prayer consisting not only of words
but also of unutterable sighs. These ascend to heaven, where Christ, “their great Intercessor,” clad like a priest with incense, comes before the Father’s throne and says:

See Father, what first fruits on earth are sprung
From thy implanted Grace in man, these Sighs
And Prayers, which in this Golden Censer, mixt
With Incense, I thy Priest before thee bring,
Fruits of more pleasing savour from thy seed
Sow’n with contrition in his heart, then those
Which his own hand manuring all the Trees
Of Paradise could have produc’l, ere fall’n
From innocence. Now therefore bend thine eare
To supplication, heare his sighs though mute;
Unskilful with what words to pray, let mee
Interpret for him, mee his Advocate
And propitiation. . .
. . . let him live
Before thee reconcil’d . . .
To better life shall yeeld him, where with mee
All my redeemd may dwell in joy and bliss,
Made one with me as I with thee am one.

And the Father answers:

All thy request for Man, accepted Son,
Obtain, all thy request was my Decree.⁴

I testify that Christ is our advocate and priest. He pleads for us. He prays for us with the Father. He has entered the heavenly Holy of Holies through His own blood and made Atonement so that we can have “the boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus.”

“Oh, it is wonderful, wonderful to me!”⁵

Notes

Bruce R. McConkie’s Final Testimony

Joseph Fielding McConkie

Joseph Fielding McConkie (joseph.mcconkie@yahoo.com) is a professor emeritus of ancient scripture at Brigham Young University.

This talk was originally given at the 2006 BYU Easter Conference. For those who would like to read Elder Bruce R. McConkie’s final conference address, visit www.lds.org and search for “The Purifying Power of Gethsemane” (Ensign, May 1985, 9).

As he stood to his full height of six feet five inches to approach the rostrum in the old Tabernacle, he was thin, even gaunt—his step measured as if his balance were uncertain. As he faced the congregation, his features were sufficiently jaundiced that many watching on television instinctively reached forward to adjust the color, yet the sound of his voice was measured, deep, and strong. It was the confident, sure sound to which the Saints had become accustomed.

“I feel,” he said, “and the Spirit seems to accord, that the most important doctrine I can declare, and the most powerful testimony I can bear, is of the atoning sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ.” Thus began the final testimony of Elder Bruce R. McConkie of the Quorum of the Twelve. What followed was one of the most electrifying testimonies ever borne from that historic spot from which prophets and apostles had been teaching and preaching since the days of President Brigham Young.

While more than two decades have passed since that solemn testimony was borne, few who were present or within the sound of his voice have forgotten the Spirit and power that attended Elder McConkie’s valedictory address. Following his remarks, President Gordon B. Hinckley said, “Thank you, Brother McConkie, for your eloquent and moving testimony given under difficult circumstances.”

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Virtually every week since that time, I have met individuals who have recounted for me the feelings that were theirs when they heard that testimony. Because those of us who are older treasure good memories and because a generation has now risen who would be blessed by those memories, I will recount some of the events that preceded that occasion. I will confine myself to those parts of the story in which I was a participant.

I will take as a point of beginning Elder McConkie’s April 1972 conference address. During that session of conference, an impression was born upon my mind that one of the speakers I was about to hear would identify himself as the one who would fill the next vacancy in the Quorum of the Twelve.

The very nature of such an impression is such that you cloak it in silence. Notwithstanding my efforts to do so, a surprising number of people came to me within the next few days to tell me they also had such an impression. My brothers and sisters each reported having people come to them saying the same kind of thing.

It was in that talk that my father first read in public the words that became the hymn “I Believe in Christ.” They are as follows:

I believe in Christ; he is my King!  
With all my heart to him I’ll sing;  
I’ll raise my voice in praise and joy,  
In grand amens my tongue employ.

I believe in Christ; he is God’s Son;  
On earth to dwell his soul did come;  
He healed the sick; the dead he raised.  
Good works were his; his name be praised.

I believe in Christ; oh, blessed name,  
As Mary’s Son he came to reign  
‘Mid mortal men, his earthly kin,  
To save them from the woes of sin.

I believe in Christ, who marked the path,  
Who did gain all his Father hath,  
Who said to men: “Come, follow me,  
That ye, my friends, with God may be.”

I believe in Christ—my Lord, my God!  
My feet he plants on gospel sod;  
I’ll worship him with all my might;  
He is the source of truth and light.

I believe in Christ; he ransoms me.  
From Satan’s grasp he sets me free,  
And I shall live with joy and love  
In his eternal courts above.
I believe in Christ; he stands supreme!
From him I'll gain my fondest dream;
And while I strive through grief and pain,
His voice is heard: “Ye shall obtain."
I believe in Christ, so come what may,
With him I'll stand in that great day
When on this earth he comes again
To rule among the sons of men.  

After that meeting President Harold B. Lee told my father that he had raised the spiritual level of the conference. The special Spirit that attended this talk was apparently intended to announce to many that they were hearing the voice of a prophet and to prepare others to receive him when that call came.

In July of that year, my grandfather, President Joseph Fielding Smith, passed away. His passing elevated Harold B. Lee to the Presidency of the Church; thus, with the reorganization of the First Presidency, a vacancy was created in the Quorum of the Twelve. Dad was asked to speak at President Smith's funeral because of the closeness he had shared with him since the days when he had started courting my mother.

As part of his preparation for that talk, Dad asked me if I knew any stories that he ought to tell about Granddaddy Smith. I had just written a little book about him.

When I interviewed my Aunt Edith, she told me a very interesting story about the birth of my grandfather. She said that his mother, Julina, who was the first of Joseph F. Smith's wives (that being in the days of polygamy), wanted very much to present him with a son who could bear his name. Julina, however, remained barren while President Smith's other wives gave birth to sons. Each in turn asked that their son be given his father's name. In each instance President Smith said, “No, the right belongs to Julina.”

So it was that Julina poured her heart out to the Lord asking for a son. In doing so, like Hannah of old, she vowed a vow, promising the Lord that if He would give her a son to bear his father’s name, she would return the child to Him for His service. So it was that Julina conceived and bore a son destined to bear his father's name and that of the Prophet Joseph Smith and destined to the Lord's service as he labored for some sixty-two years as an Apostle.

Having told that story to my father, I hesitated a little. I had just received a master's degree in history. I was concerned that historians might not think the story good history, its source being an eighty-three-year-old lady. I told Dad of my concerns.

The following day as I took my seat in the Tabernacle next to my brother Mark, I said, “I am a little worried about what Dad might say
today.” He said, “Yes, I know. Dad told me. He said, ‘But what Joseph
doesn’t know is that I will know!’”

Dad used the story at the funeral, thus affirming that the Spirit
had confirmed that it represented good history, and I learned a lesson
that went beyond what I had been taught in the college classroom. In
any event, there was an unusual power that attended the talk he gave.
It appears that the veil became very thin for him. Dad was invited to
speak at the Joseph F. Smith family reunion the following November.
On that occasion, he said that President Joseph F. Smith was present
at his son’s funeral and added, “He was there to display his love and
concern for the family.”

In the month following the funeral, Dad was assigned to participate
in an area conference held in Mexico City. At that conference when the
names of the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve were read
for a sustaining vote, he distinctly heard his own name read.

In the October 1972 conference, Dad was called to the apostleship. In his maiden address, he chose to identify the special spiritual
endowment or gift he had been given relative to bearing witness of
Christ. He spoke as follows:

As members of the church and kingdom of God on earth, we enjoy
the gifts of the Spirit—those wonders and glories and miracles that a
gracious and benevolent God always has bestowed upon his faithful
saints. The first of these gifts listed in our modern revelation on spiritual
gifts is the gift of testimony, the gift of revelation, the gift of knowing
of the truth and divinity of the work. This gift is elsewhere described as
the testimony of Jesus, which is the spirit of prophecy. This is my gift.
I know this work is true.

I have a perfect knowledge that Jesus Christ is the Son of the living
God and that he was crucified for the sins of the world. I know that
Joseph Smith is a prophet of God through whose instrumentality the
fullness of the everlasting gospel has been restored again in our day.
And I know that this Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is the
kingdom of God on earth, and that as now constituted, with President
Harold B. Lee at its head, it has the approval and approbation of the
Lord, is in the line of its duty, and is preparing a people for the second
coming of the Son of Man.4

When I met my father after that conference, the first thing I asked
him was if his call had come in the same manner as that of President
Heber J. Grant when he was called to the apostleship. Without hesita-
tion and knowing full well what I had reference to, he said, “Yes.”

President Grant’s call had come as a result of a council held in the
world of the spirits after deliberation on the part of the Prophet Joseph
Smith and President Grant’s father, Jedediah M. Grant, who had served as a counselor in the First Presidency to Brigham Young. In the Tabernacle that day, my mother did not hear my father’s voice as he talked but rather heard the voice of his father, Oscar W. McConkie.

President Lee let it slip that Dad was not the man he had wanted to call. My uncle Oscar asked Dad if that didn’t hurt his feelings a little to know that he was not the Prophet’s choice. “Goodness no,” Dad responded, “I would much rather know that I was the Lord’s choice.”

After years of service, in January of 1984, my father underwent exploratory surgery to determine the reason for some spots that had been detected on his liver. It was discovered that his whole system was riddled with cancer. The doctors gave him a matter of weeks to live. Blessings were given, and a quiet miracle was performed. The two or three weeks were extended for some sixteen months. During that time, my brothers and I were privileged to give Dad a special blessing in which the promise and assurance were given that he would live to write every word, teach every doctrine, and bear every testimony he had been ordained in the councils of heaven to do. When President Hinckley blessed him, he simply said, “I seal upon you the blessing given by your family.”

Sometime before conference, probably the last Saturday in March, Mother recounted:

Dad came into the kitchen and said, “Would you like to hear what I have prepared for general conference?” I was making him a pie, because his appetite had begun to go downhill, and I thought maybe he’d like an apple pie. I had the apples all ready to put in it, and I was rolling up the dough, the oven was on, everything was ready, and he came in and sat down and started to read me his talk and the tears streamed down his face. He didn’t get more than a couple of sentences out and I thought to myself, “You don’t make apple pies when somebody is saying these things to you.” So I sat down, dropped everything, and listened to him. I asked him, “How are you going to be able to get up and read this?” Because there he was, having a hard time saying what he was saying because he was so touched. And he said, “I don’t know, but I’m going to do it.”

On Monday, April 1, my dad’s brother Brit gave him a blessing. He said that Dad still had work to do and that the devil had been rebuked. Brit blessed him to have the strength to get through conference. Elder Boyd K. Packer came on Tuesday and blessed him and again affirmed that he had more to do.

On Tuesday evening, April 2, Mother called our home. I answered the phone. I could tell immediately from the sound of her voice that something was seriously wrong. She said, “I called to wish you a happy
birthday,” my birthday being the next day. She then explained that Dad’s blood tests had come back that day and that they were very bad. “The doctors can do nothing for him,” she said. “They told me to take him home and make him as comfortable as possible” for what they said would be the last few days of his life. She told us that Dad had instructed her that the family was to accept the will of the Lord and that they were not to fast and pray anymore for the extension of his life.

As for conference, she explained that the doctors said that he would be too weak to speak and that should he try, he would pass out in front of a national television audience and embarrass the whole Church. “Nevertheless,” she said, “your father wants to give that talk. It means more to him than anything he has done in this life, but he cannot even finish reading it to me, as each time he attempts to do so he breaks down in tears.”

After Mother’s call, with my sister Vivian’s help, we contacted my other brothers and sisters to relay Mother’s message and to unite the family in a fast—not contrary to his wishes in pleading for the extension of his life but rather that he might be granted both the strength and the emotional control to give the talk he had written.

Wednesday evening, April 3, my wife Brenda and I went up to visit Mom and Dad. He had just returned from his meetings with the Twelve and was exhausted. We visited with Mother while Dad took a nap. Mother insisted on feeding us and cooked some hamburgers. Dad came in and sat at the table with us. This was especially gracious of him because he had no appetite and because the smell of food nauseated him. He also ate a little, which greatly pleased Mother. Brenda gave him a supply of diet supplement pills that were something like an energy bar but smaller. He could eat these because they were odorless. They may have been his primary food supply for the next few days. I remember watching him put one in his mouth just before he got up to speak at conference.

Our prayer was answered. Dad was given both the strength and emotional control to give his talk. When he was called on that Saturday morning, the sixth of April, the Spirit took over, and one of the most powerful talks ever given in the Tabernacle was delivered.

Heaven does not send forth the Spirit to sustain weak doctrines. It is the power of the doctrine that attracts the power of the Spirit. Christ, Elder McConkie declared, died to preserve the truth. “All of the terms and conditions of the Father’s eternal plan of salvation became operative,” he testified, “in and through Christ’s atoning sacrifice.” Because He died, we have a plan of salvation! Because He died, our righteous
deeds will rise with us in the Resurrection. Because He died, we, by obedience to the laws and ordinances of the gospel, may lay claim to a fulness of all that the Father has.

With great emotion, Elder McConkie spoke of the “three gardens of God—the Garden of Eden, the Garden of Gethsemane, and the Garden of the Empty Tomb.” He taught us that Eden was “a paradisiacal state,” one in which there could be no death, no procreation, and no probationary experiences. It was from such a state, he explained, that Adam and Eve stepped down to become the “first mortal flesh on earth.”

“Thus, Creation is father to the Fall; and by the Fall came mortality and death; and by Christ came immortality and eternal life. If there had been no fall of Adam, by which cometh death, there could have been no atonement of Christ by which cometh life,” he declared.

With trembling in his voice, he concluded, “And now, as pertaining to this perfect atonement, wrought by the shedding of the blood of God—I testify that it took place in Gethsemane and at Golgotha, and as pertaining to Jesus Christ, I testify that he is the Son of the Living God and was crucified for the sins of the world. He is our Lord, our God, and our King. This I know of myself independent of any other person. I am one of his witnesses, and in a coming day I shall feel the nail marks in his hands and in his feet and shall wet his feet with my tears. But I shall not know any better then than I know now that he is God’s Almighty Son, that he is our Savior and Redeemer, and that salvation comes in and through his atoning blood and in no other way.”

On Sunday, April 14, Elder Packer came and blessed Dad for the final time. Elder Packer said that the promises given in the previous blessings were fulfilled in Dad’s conference address and that it was a miracle we had had him this year. Before this blessing, Dad had rested on his bed during the day with his clothes on, refusing to make the concession to his illness by remaining in bed. He had also refused to eat in the bedroom. Regardless of how bad he felt, he would come to the kitchen to make the attempt to eat. After Elder Packer’s blessing, Dad turned to Mother and said, “Do you know what he did?” Mother told him she would try to live to be an honor and credit to him. He cried.

Elder Packer visited with Mother and left. His instructions to the family were in like manner not to resist the will of the Lord. When they had left the room, Dad got up and with what little strength he had, undressed, pulled the covers back, and got into bed, thus signaling that the battle was over. Thereafter he refused food but did take a little water. On April 19, 1985, thirteen days after his conference address, he passed away while the family knelt at his bedside and prayed that his
spirit might be released. His final instruction to his wife and family was to “Carry on.”

Notes

We are greatly blessed in the Church of Jesus Christ to be led by inspired men of great experience and wisdom. This experience and wisdom is gained by many years of devoted service in the leading councils of the Church and by continual schooling in matters of the kingdom by the Lord Himself and by the association with other leading Brethren.

Many years ago, President Gordon B. Hinckley was interviewed by Mike Wallace as part of a national television program featuring the Church. During the interview, they had the following exchange:

Mike Wallace: There are those who say, this [church] is a gerontocracy, this is a church run by old men.

Gordon B. Hinckley: Isn’t it wonderful? To have a man of maturity at the head, a man of judgment, who isn’t blown about by every wind of doctrine?

Mike Wallace: Absolutely, as long as he’s not dotty.

Gordon B. Hinckley: Thank you for the compliment.¹

President Hinckley’s comment is true and appropriate. Maturity and judgment are the hallmarks of the great men who have led and continue to lead the Lord’s kingdom.

Following are some interesting questions and answers that deal with the longevity of service of the Brethren, both recent and in the past.
Question 1: What is the longest period of time that has elapsed without a change being made in either the Quorum of the First Presidency or the Quorum of the Twelve?

Answer: The longest period of time that has elapsed without a change in the First Presidency or the Quorum of the Twelve is nine years and three months. Henry B. Eyring was sustained as a member of the Quorum of the Twelve on April 6, 1995, and no changes occurred in either quorum until Elder Neal A. Maxwell passed away on July 21, 2004. The second longest time period was six years and six months, from October 7, 1889, to April 6, 1896. Three vacancies in the Quorum of the Twelve were filled on October 7, 1889, with the ordinations of Marriner W. Merrill, Anthon H. Lund, and Abraham H. Cannon. The next change occurred on April 6, 1896, when Moses Thatcher was released from the Quorum of the Twelve. (If you correctly answered this question, you must either be the Church Historian or one of the Three Nephites.)

Question 2: Can you name the Apostle in this dispensation who served the longest as an Apostle without serving as President of the Church?

Answer: Franklin Dewey Richards. Elder Richards was born on April 2, 1821, at Richmond, Massachusetts. He was ordained an Apostle on February 12, 1849, and served faithfully as an Apostle until his death on December 9, 1899. He thus served as an Apostle for fifty years and ten months without serving as the President of the Church.

Question 3: President Gordon B. Hinckley and Elder David B. Haight served concurrently as nonagenarian Apostles (between ninety and one hundred years of age) from President Hinckley’s ninetieth birthday (June 23, 2000) until Elder Haight’s death (July 31, 2004). They thus were nonagenarians together for four years and one month. Only one other time in this dispensation have we had two nonagenarian Apostles serving concurrently. Can you identify the other occurrence?

Answer: The only other time that we have had two nonagenarian Apostles serving at the same time was with President David O. McKay and President Joseph Fielding Smith. President McKay turned ninety on September 8, 1963, while serving as President of the Church. President Smith turned ninety on July 19, 1966, while serving as President of the Quorum of the Twelve. They served concurrently as nonagenarian apostles until January 18, 1970, when President McKay passed away. They thus were nonagenarians together for three years and six months.
Question 4: President Gordon B. Hinckley, our current Church President, is a nonagenarian. Besides President Hinckley, we have had eleven other nonagenarian Apostles serve in this dispensation. How many of these other eleven can you name?

Answer: Besides President Hinckley, the other nonagenarian Apostles that have served (listed by order of call to the apostleship) are Wilford Woodruff, Charles W. Penrose, David O. McKay, Joseph Fielding Smith, J. Reuben Clark Jr., Spencer W. Kimball, Ezra Taft Benson, Marion G. Romney, LeGrand Richards, Hugh B. Brown, and David B. Haight.

Question 5: Which of the Apostles in this dispensation served the longest as an Apostle?

Answer: President David O. McKay has served the longest as an Apostle. He was ordained an Apostle by Joseph F. Smith on April 9, 1906, and he passed away on January 18, 1970. He was thus an Apostle for sixty-three years and nine months. Heber J. Grant was an Apostle for sixty-two years and seven months, and Joseph Fielding Smith for sixty-two years and three months.

Question 6: What is the longest period of time that has elapsed without a change being made in Quorum of the Twelve?

Answer: The longest time period that has elapsed without a change in the Quorum of the Twelve is ten years and two months. This occurred from March 17, 1921, to May 16, 1931. During this period, Heber J. Grant was the President of the Church, and Rudger Clawson was the President of the Quorum of the Twelve. The second-longest period of time without a change in the Quorum of the Twelve was nine years and four months. This occurred from April 6, 1995 (with the ordination of Elder Henry B. Eyring), to July 21, 2004 (with the death of Elder Neal A. Maxwell). President Gordon B. Hinckley served as President of the Church during these years.

Question 7: What is the greatest length of time that has elapsed between the births of two future Apostles in this dispensation?

Answer: The greatest length of time that has elapsed between the births of two future Apostles in this dispensation is eleven years and six months. This was the length of time between the births of Elder Jeffrey R. Holland (December 3, 1940) and Elder David A. Bednar (June 15, 1952). The second greatest length of time was six years and five months, between the births of Elder Henry B. Eyring and Elder Dieter F. Uchtdorf.
Question 8: Which of the Apostles who have served in this dispensation was oldest at the time of his apostolic call? (Bonus question: The fourth and fifth oldest Brethren at the time of their calls to the apostleship are both recent or current members of the Quorum of the Twelve. Can you name these two Brethren?)

Answer: The oldest to be called as an Apostle was George Q. Morris. He was eighty years and two months old at the time of his ordination (birthday: February 20, 1874, apostolic ordination: April 8, 1954). The fourth and fifth oldest Brethren to be called as Apostles are Elders David B. Haight and Joseph B. Wirthlin, both of whom were sixty years and four months old at the time of their apostolic ordinations.

Question 9: How many of the mothers of our latter-day prophets lived long enough to see their sons serve as the President of the Church? How many mothers of latter-day prophets were alive when their sons were ordained Apostles?

Answer: The only mother of a Church President who was alive during her son’s service as President is Lucy Mack Smith, mother of the Prophet Joseph. Joseph was martyred in 1844, and Lucy Smith died in 1856. Seven of the mothers of our Church Presidents were alive when their sons were ordained Apostles. These seven are Lucy Mack Smith (Joseph Smith), Agnes Taylor (John Taylor), Rachel Ridgway Ivins Grant (Heber J. Grant), Sarah Farr Smith (George Albert Smith), Julina Lambson Smith (Joseph Fielding Smith), Louisa Emeline Bingham Lee (Harold B. Lee), and Nellie Marie Rasmussen Hunter (Howard W. Hunter).

Question 10: Which Apostle in this dispensation served the longest length of time in the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles?

Answer: The Apostle that served the longest in the Quorum of the Twelve was Elder Joseph Fielding Smith. He was a member of the Quorum of the Twelve for fifty-nine years and ten months (April 7, 1910, to January 23, 1970). He then served as President of the Church for two years and five months.

Note

Do You Know Who You Really Are?

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This address was given at a Brigham Young University–Idaho devotional on February 7, 2006.

What a great blessing it is for me to be here with you on this lovely campus! I was impressed with the students and the campus when I was here with the Tabernacle Choir a few years ago and have looked forward to being here again. There is a great spirit here at Brigham Young University–Idaho. Not only are you students blessed to be here but you are also a blessing to those you meet throughout the world as you carry forth the banner of truth and righteousness in your words and actions.

We are all brothers and sisters in an eternal family and need to love and care about one another. You already know that premortally we lived with our Heavenly Father, who taught us the great plan of happiness. Most of you remember the teachings found in the Primary song “I Am a Child of God.” The song’s lyrics teach profound truths in a very simple way. From these teachings, we learn not only that we are spirit sons and daughters of God but that we have a purpose here on the earth. We were sent here by a loving Heavenly Father to live with earthly mothers and fathers and to learn how to return to Him again. This concept is understood even by young children.

One day, my mother was shopping with her two preschool daughters. The two-year-old became upset at being confined to the grocery cart and not being able to roam about freely like her four-year-old sister. She began to cry in frustration. All attempts to calm her were to no avail. As
she began to wail louder, the four-year-old said to her sister, “Christie! You don’t need to cry. Don’t you know you’re a child of God?”

_Do you know who you really are?_ Think about that question. If you were asked by a stranger, “Who are you?” most of you would probably say your name, thinking that would be a sufficient answer. Or you might say that you are a son or daughter of your parents. If that person knows your parents or siblings or some other relative, the stranger may feel he or she knows something about you. But you all know that is not the whole story.

**You Were Chosen Before You Were Born**

Elder Russell M. Nelson says, “If my fondest wish could be granted, it would be that we know who we really are, and that we know we come from premortal realms where we were numbered ‘among the noble and great ones’ who were chosen in the beginning to be rulers in the Church of God.”

You were selected to come to earth at this time, in this place, doing what you are doing under these favored circumstances. You are among the noble and great ones of our Father’s kingdom. President Gordon B. Hinckley once told the youth of the Church: “You are not ‘dead-end’ kids. You are not wasting your lives in drifting aimlessly. You have purpose. You have design. You have plans that can only lead to growth and strength.”

So how did you get to this point in your life? As the turtle said when he looked around and found himself on top of a fence post, “It’s clear I didn’t get here all by myself.” To whom do we owe our thanks for our situation?

First, we must acknowledge that we are children of God with divine potential and that He has blessed us to come to earth at this time. The gospel has been restored in this dispensation, and we have had the opportunity to accept it and to receive the blessings of the Atonement of Jesus Christ. You can draw upon His power to help you become like Him. We are eternally indebted to our Father and our Elder Brother for this great plan of happiness.

Second, we are blessed to have come to earth to reside in a family. Families are to love and nurture children, providing opportunities for learning and growth. Regardless of how good or bad we think our families are, we owe our thanks to them because they have given us life.

Third, our present situation has been affected by the lives of many people who have gone before us. We may not realize it, but our ancestors played a role in how we have become who we are. For example,
many of you might have ancestors who accepted the gospel and remained faithful to the Church. Without their influence, you might not be here at BYU–Idaho. Perhaps you do not know your progenitors personally, but they know you and are depending on you to carry on their name. Let me illustrate this idea with a story about a family.

**Generational Effects**

Last year, I attended a play at Brigham Young University in Provo called *Handing Down the Names*, by Steven Dietz. Although the characters were fictional, the play was a family story based on historical facts. The play begins with a woman named Irina living in Colorado in the 1940s. She introduces the play by saying that each family has a history but that the beginning is difficult to find. She takes off her wedding ring and places it on the table.

The play then steps back in time almost two hundred years as we see a young widow named Ruth Dorn in Germany. She picks up the wedding ring, saying that it belonged to her husband, Henry. He had just been killed in a war. His brother then arrives for the funeral. Ruth is expecting her first child, and the brother offers to marry her so the child can have a name and a family. The young family decides to travel to Russia to colonize an area along the Volga River. The mother dies during the journey, and the father cares for the child, eking out an existence in the harsh land. Even though that baby daughter is not his biological child, she gives his life a purpose.

The play then shifts to the early 1900s, showing descendants of the Dorn family leaving their home along the Volga River to come to America. Unfortunately, the mother dies on the ship, but the father carries on with his three adult children. Upon arriving at Ellis Island, one of the daughters, Katie, is found to have an eye infection. She is sent back to Russia, and the rest of the family helplessly watch her leave. They move to Colorado, where they work hard to raise enough money for Katie and her husband to join them. They pray constantly that their family can be reunited. One year follows the next, and they cannot understand why Katie’s family does not come. We find out later that Katie never received the money or the letters because of political interference.

Katie eventually has a son named Adam. Before she dies, she tells him to do whatever he can to go to America and join her family. Just as World War II is starting in Europe, Adam finds someone who offers to help him leave Russia and go to America. However, as he enters Hamburg, Germany, preparing to board the ship for his journey across the Atlantic, he is seized and conscripted into the German Army.
He is captured and sent to America as a prisoner of war. Ironically, or maybe providentially, his imprisonment is in the same area of northern Colorado where his now deceased grandfather and uncle had lived. The prisoners are forced to work for farmers in the area, and that is where he meets Irina, a young woman whose father was also from the German colonies along the Volga River. He recognizes that she is one of his own people. After the war, he is sent back to Germany but later manages to return to Irina in Colorado, bringing the wedding ring that had been handed down for many generations. Ruth Dorn, from two hundred years earlier, then enters the stage, saying, “He farms now, on land where he’d been held prisoner. She wears a ring that I wore, nearly two hundred years ago. And their son, Henry, wears a name that belonged to my husband—a name seven generations in the making.”

This family story touched me because it showed how the individuals who lived in the twentieth century were profoundly influenced by their family members from previous generations. You may not realize it, but your life and situation have come about in part because of the decisions made by your ancestors. As the playwright Steven Dietz states, “We can look back . . . because they chose to look forward.”

We may not understand why we were born to our particular family with its unique heritage, but we can be sure that our ancestors are a part of us. Our current lives are like a tapestry being woven with threads coming from various people and places. God is the master weaver. He can help us gather the loose ends of the tapestry, enabling us to turn our hearts to our fathers, as Malachi prophesied (see Malachi 4:6).

The Role Our Ancestors Played

An example of a tapestry being woven by the hand of God can be found in the life and family of the Prophet Joseph Smith. During the celebration of the two hundredth anniversary of his birth, we were often reminded of his foreordination to restore the gospel of Jesus Christ. His life was dedicated to the service of the Lord, and the work he brought forth in restoring the gospel has blessed millions of people. President Brigham Young taught that Joseph Smith was foreordained before the world was to be the man who would “receive the fulness of the keys and power of the Priesthood of the Son of God. The Lord had his eyes upon him, and upon his father, and upon his father’s father, and upon their progenitors clear back to Abraham, and from Abraham to the flood, from the flood to Enoch, and from Enoch to Adam. He has watched that family and that blood as it has circulated from its fountain to the birth of that man.”
Think about that statement for a moment. What might it mean to you? You may not have been foreordained to be a prophet, but is it not possible that you have some special mission on the earth? In Alma 13:3, we learn that individuals who are ordained and called to holy callings in the priesthood were “called and prepared from the foundation of the world according to the foreknowledge of God, on account of their exceeding faith and good works” in the premortal world. Although they are not mentioned in this scripture, I believe faithful women also were chosen before they were born to carry out our Father’s work. If you, then, were one of the “noble and great ones” that Abraham saw in vision (see Abraham 3:22–23), is it not possible that the Lord had His eye on your ancestors, just as He watched over Joseph Smith’s progenitors? I believe He did. All people who have accepted the gospel are counted among the descendants of Abraham, and because of this lineage, we can expect that Heavenly Father cared for our ancestors as much as He cares for us (see Abraham 2:10–11).

For example, many of my ancestors were early members of the restored Church. They were pioneers who left their homes and families and journeyed to the Great Salt Lake Valley. They had the faith to wade through affliction, even though it meant losing loved ones along the way. They walked over a thousand miles, sometimes wearing only rags to cover their feet after their shoes were worn out. Yet they did it all in response to a prophet’s call.

My third-great-grandmother was known as “Wee Granny” because she was a very tiny Scottish woman. She and several of her family members heard the gospel and joined the Church in Scotland. Her son, John, brought his family to Utah in the early 1850s. Several years later, Wee Granny boarded the ship to join her son here and was assigned to the Martin handcart company. Being in her seventies, she found the journey to be very difficult. By the time the company arrived at Chimney Rock, Nebraska, she was overcome by exhaustion and could go no farther. Just before she died, she said to those with her, “Tell John I died with my face towards Zion.” This example of faith has been taught to my family for generations and has been a lasting legacy for us to follow.

Essentially, our lives have been greatly influenced by the lives of many people who came before us. You might be saying to yourself, “I don’t have any pioneer ancestors. What have they done for me?” Even those who have found the gospel in recent years have been influenced by the faith of the early pioneers.

Elder Dieter F. Uchtdorf of the Quorum of the Twelve grew up in Germany. His family joined the Church when he was a young child.
and became pioneers of the Church in their land. Even though he has no ancestors among the nineteenth-century pioneers of the Church, he said he feels “a close kinship to those early pioneers who crossed the plains. They are my spiritual ancestry, as they are for each and every member of the Church, regardless of nationality, language, or culture. They have established . . . a spiritual foundation for the building of the kingdom of God in all the nations of the world.” You and your family might be today’s pioneers of faithfulness, just as Elder Uchtdorf and his family were in their land.

Sister Elaine S. Dalton, a counselor in the Young Women general presidency, said that during a trip she made to Nauvoo, she pondered how her ancestors could have given up everything they had, suffering persecution and trials as they traveled across the plains. She wondered why they had sacrificed so much for their testimony of the gospel. She had the impression come to her that her ancestors and those early Saints would say, “We did this for you.” If they did so much for us, we need to do something for them. One thing we can do is live up to the heritage we have been given.

Our Responsibility to Live Up to Our Name

I remind you of the story about President George Albert Smith. He was very ill and one day lost consciousness. In that state, he felt he had gone beyond the veil into the spirit world. He saw a man whom he recognized as his grandfather, the Apostle George A. Smith, after whom he had been named. They approached each other; then his grandfather stopped and said, “I would like to know what you have done with my name.” President Smith saw his whole life pass before him in review, and afterward he smiled and said to his grandfather, “I have never done anything with your name of which you need be ashamed.” What joy and gratitude he had in knowing that he had kept his grandfather’s name unsullied.

Remember, you also have taken upon yourselves the name of the Lord Jesus Christ through baptism into the Church. With this name comes the obligation to honor Him and follow Him, just as you might honor your own parents. There will come a day when you will meet Jesus Christ, and the question might be asked of you, “What have you done with my name?”

To help us see the eternal view of the family, President Gordon B. Hinckley talked about being at a temple dedication along with his daughter, granddaughter, and great-granddaughter. As he sat there, he
reflected on his heritage. His great-grandfather was the first one in his line to join the Church. His grandfather had been baptized in Nauvoo, and his own father had also served faithfully in the Church. He said, “I suddenly realized that I stood right in the middle of these seven generations—three before me and three after me. In that sacred and hallowed house there passed through my mind a sense of the tremendous obligation that was mine to pass on all that I had received as an inheritance from my forebears to the generations who have now come after me.”

He said he recognized that his family was a long chain of people connected together, and he did not want to become the weak link in the chain. He then counseled all of us to remain faithful to the Church so we do not become the weak link in the chain of our generations. We owe it to our ancestors and our posterity to pass on a name that is untarnished and pure.

You might be familiar with the comic strip “Pickles,” by Brian Crane. On July 15, 2001, the cartoon showed a grandfather and his grandson talking to each other. The grandfather asks, “Have you been a good boy lately, Nelson?”

The grandson’s reply is, “Yeah, I guess.”

The grandfather says, “Good. A lot of people are counting on you.” “Like who?” asks the little boy.

The grandfather then reminds him that he has two parents, four grandparents, eight great-grandparents, and sixteen great-great-grandparents and then pulls out his calculator and figures out that in the previous five hundred years there were 1,048,576 people all involved in the creation of his grandson. Then, he points out, “That’s a lot of folks counting on you to make something of yourself, boy. So . . . don’t let us down!”

Nelson walks away, commenting to his dog, “Peer pressure is nothing compared to ancestor pressure!”

That little boy recognized that he had a name to live up to. He understood that he not only has a really big fan club of people who are concerned about him but also has a lot of people who are depending on him. That “ancestor pressure” can be a positive influence in our lives.

You each have your own personal fan club, even if you don’t realize it. Perhaps someone like a parent, a sibling, a spouse, or a friend cheers for you when you do great things and sorrows with you when you are discouraged. In addition, somewhere beyond the veil, many people are cheering for you and depending on you because you belong to them and they want you to succeed.
Our Responsibility to Help Our Ancestors Receive Salvation

In addition to living up to our heritage, what else should we do to handle that “ancestor pressure”? Think of all those people who have gone before us and are now watching over us and depending on us to help them. The Prophet Joseph Smith taught, “The greatest responsibility in this world that God has laid upon us is to seek after our dead.” Why would he say that? I believe it is because of the eternal nature of families and the importance of the plan of happiness. Heavenly Father invites all of His children to return to live with Him someday.

There are some requirements for entering into the celestial kingdom, however. Jesus taught, “Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3). According to this statement, all men and women who have ever lived on the earth or who will live on the earth must be baptized by proper authority if they are to enter into the celestial kingdom.

Many Christians throughout the world have wondered what happens to the billions of people who have died without the knowledge of Christ. The Lord revealed the answer to the Prophet Joseph Smith, as recorded in Doctrine and Covenants 137. The Prophet had a vision of the celestial kingdom in which he saw the Father and the Son, along with prophets such as Adam and Abraham. In addition, he saw his brother Alvin, who had died before the Church was organized and consequently had not been baptized. Joseph said he “marveled how it was that [Alvin] had obtained an inheritance in that kingdom” (D&C 137:6). Verse 7 records: “Thus came the voice of the Lord unto me, saying: All who have died without a knowledge of this gospel who would have received it if they had been permitted to tarry, shall be heirs of the celestial kingdom” (D&C 137:7). What a comforting promise! It means that Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ are both just and merciful. A way has been provided for all of our spirit brothers and sisters to have the opportunity to hear the gospel and be baptized so they can return to our Father in Heaven.

However, baptism and other gospel ordinances are earthly experiences. The third article of faith states: “We believe that through the Atonement of Christ, all mankind may be saved, by obedience to the laws and ordinances of the Gospel.” Through the great gift of the Atonement of Jesus Christ, we have the opportunity to repent and gain forgiveness of our sins, ultimately receiving an inheritance in the celestial kingdom if we are worthy. People who did not hear or accept the gospel in mortality but who receive it in the spirit world can obey
the laws and ordinances of the gospel because of the work done in the
temples on their behalf (see D&C 138:32–35). You can each perform
these saving ordinances in the temple for your progenitors. Soon, a
new temple will be dedicated right here in Rexburg, which will give
you more opportunity to fulfill your responsibilities to your ancestors.

The foundation of the work for the redemption of the dead was
laid in 1823 when Moroni came to Joseph Smith and restated Malachi’s
prophecy that Elijah would come to turn “the heart of the children to
their fathers” (Malachi 4:6). Significantly, Joseph Smith learned of this
prophecy prior to the coming forth of the Book of Mormon and the
organization of the Church. Temple and family history work must be
very important to the Lord. This prophecy was fulfilled on April 3,
1836, in the Kirtland Temple. On that day, the priesthood keys of the
sealing power were given to Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery under
the hand of Elijah. The hearts of the children began to turn toward
their fathers at that time, as people throughout the world became inter-

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has provided many
resources to help us fulfill our obligation to our ancestors. The Family
History Library in Salt Lake City and the more than four thousand Fam-
ily History Centers throughout the world are available for anyone who
desires to search for their ancestors. The Internet site www.familysearch.
org is a great place to begin your family history research. There is so
much we can do to learn more about our ancestors, and the oppor-
tunities become greater as technological advances make family history
research easier and easier.

Elder D. Todd Christofferson of the Presidency of the Seventy
reminded us that the time and the resources the Church puts behind
the commitment to redeem the dead are “an expression of our witness
concerning Jesus Christ. It constitutes as powerful a statement as we
can make concerning His divine character and mission.” The Church
would not expend the resources and energy it does to build temples
and provide family history data to the world if we did not believe that
Jesus Christ is “the way, the truth, and the life” and has invited all
people to come unto the Father through Him (see John 14:6).

Our ancestors need our help to receive the blessings of the Atone-
ment through the proxy temple ordinances we can perform for them.
The work we do in the temple also blesses our own lives. We can go
forth from the house of the Lord “armed with [His] power” (D&C
109:22). What great blessings are in store for us when we participate
in this work of redeeming the dead! I am grateful that our Heavenly
Father would allow us to take part in saving His children who did not have the opportunity to receive the gospel in mortality.

Joseph Smith taught that “they without us cannot be made perfect—neither can we without our dead be made perfect” (D&C 128:15). Salvation is a family affair. If we want to be united eternally with our family, we need to help our brothers and sisters who have gone before us to be sealed as eternal families as well. We can pray that the Spirit of Elijah will enter into our hearts and assist us with our obligation of redeeming our ancestors.

Conclusion

In summary, we need to remember that our family heritage, both earthly and celestial, has enabled us to be who we are today. We can learn who we really are by finding ourselves in our ancestors. In this process, we will feel gratitude, admiration, and love for them. We will recognize how their lives are intertwined with ours, and one day, when we meet them beyond the veil, we will know them. I offer you a challenge to prepare for the dedication of the Rexburg Idaho Temple by searching for your own family names to take to the temple when it opens. Attending the temple will have a great deal of meaning for you if you can perform ordinances for individuals whom you have researched. Just think “how great shall be your joy” if you bring souls unto Christ through your family history research and temple work (see D&C 18:15–16).

My testimony is that Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ have provided a plan of happiness through which we and our families can progress to become like Them. Performing temple ordinances allows our ancestors to have access to these eternal blessings. I testify that you will gain a greater love for your family and for the Savior and our Heavenly Father as you participate in the redemption of the dead. You will learn who you really are. I know this to be true. NE

Notes

4. Steven Dietz, Handing Down the Names, manuscript, 1994, 115.
5. Steven Dietz, April 25, 1995, Seattle, playbill for the premier production of Handing Down the Names at A Contemporary Theatre, Seattle, June 1995;


Papyrus Codex $^\text{p}66$ (Bodmer II), c. AD 200, Foundation Martin Bodmer Bibliothèque et Musée, Geneva, Switzerland.

This codex, or ancient book, is one of the earliest complete copies of the New Testament and is open to the Greek text of John 6:51-57, which comes from the end of Jesus's famous Bread of Life sermon. The page begins with "The bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world."

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The Distinctive Testimonies of the Four Gospels

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Church curriculum for Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John generally follows a harmony approach. This method reconstructs the life of Jesus Christ by merging all the Gospel accounts and hypothesizing a chronology.¹ This approach has ancient roots: Tatian, an early Christian apologist, used the four Gospels to create one single harmony, the Diatessaron (c. AD 175).² This text was very influential in Syria during the third and fourth centuries.

A harmony approach has some advantages, including providing a comprehensive view of what the Gospels record of the Savior’s life and teachings. This approach, however, also has some limitations. For example, no harmony of the Gospels can provide a complete account of Christ’s life because the Gospels were essentially individual testimonies written for different audiences and were not intended to be all-inclusive accounts of Christ’s life and teachings. Significantly, the Joseph Smith Translation designates the Gospel of Matthew and the Gospel of John as “testimonies” rather than “gospels.”³ Elder McConkie stated, “It is apparent . . . that each inspired author had especial and intimate knowledge of certain circumstances not so well known to others, and that each felt impressed to emphasize different matters because of the particular people to whom he was addressing his personal testimony.”⁴

Another limitation of the harmony approach is illustrated by Papias, a second-century church leader who quoted John the presbyter’s statement that Mark “wrote down accurately, but not in order, all that [Peter] remembered of the things said and done by the Lord.”⁵
As a further complication, the Gospels of Matthew and Luke sometimes record a different order of events than does the Gospel of Mark. Because the Gospels occasionally differ in their order of events, scholars have a difficult time establishing a precise chronology for a harmony. A third limitation is that a harmony approach obliterates the unique emphases of the individual Gospel writers. While there is much that the Gospel authors agree upon, each has written to a different audience, with a different purpose in mind. John’s Gospel, in particular, contains an abundance of material not found in the other Gospel accounts. Yet even the synoptic Gospels—Matthew, Mark, and Luke, which relate many of the same events and teachings—present their shared material in ways that are unique to their Gospels. In other words, each Evangelist wrote his account for a specific purpose and expected that his portrait of the Savior would be seen as complete in itself.

Modern readers can learn much from the Gospels by examining what they chose to include and how they chose to write it. In this article, we will examine some of the ways that each author has presented the life and teachings of the Savior. Such a study will allow teachers and readers to appreciate better the distinctive contributions of each Gospel to our understanding of the life and teachings of our Savior.

This article will discuss dating, authorship, and provenance of each Gospel and then summarize the distinctive witness of Jesus Christ that each account provides. The scope of this article does not allow a complete, detailed examination; instead, we will focus on some of the general themes. The notes contain additional sources that will aid readers who wish to investigate further. This study will begin with Mark’s Gospel because it is likely the earliest of the synoptics. We will then continue with Matthew and Luke, who are likely dependent upon Mark’s account, noting some ways that they have edited the Gospel of Mark and included their own unique material. Finally, we will conclude with the most unique Gospel, written by John.

The Gospel of Mark

Of the four Gospel writers, Mark is the only one to call his work a “gospel”: “The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God” (Mark 1:1). The identification of the first four books of the New Testament as Gospels, therefore, originates from Mark’s introduction. The word Gospel comes from the Greek word euangellion, which means “good news.” The good news of Jesus Christ is that He came to earth to perform His mission for us (see 3 Nephi 27:13–21).
Dating, authorship, and provenance. Most scholars date the Gospel of Mark to the time of the Jewish War (c. AD 66–73). This dating is due, in part, to the Savior’s reference to the destruction of Herod’s Temple (see Mark 13:2) that occurred in AD 70. For scholars who do not accept the possibility of prophecy, Mark’s Gospel could not have been written before that event. But as Joel Marcus has concluded, “In favor of a pre-70 dating is the probability that Jesus actually prophesied the Temple’s destruction, as did other Jewish prophets down through the centuries; . . . a prophecy of its end, therefore, would not require a post-70 date.”

Some early Christian traditions claim that Mark wrote his Gospel around the time of the death of Peter, which occurred in Rome in AD 64 or 65.

Mark is often identified with “John, whose surname was Mark,” the missionary companion of Paul during the Apostle’s first mission (Acts 12:25). According to the book of Acts, John Mark left that mission early to return to Jerusalem (see Acts 13:13). The cause for John Mark’s early departure is unknown, but it later caused a temporary rift between Barnabas and Paul when, in preparation for their second mission, Barnabas wanted to bring along John Mark but Paul refused (see Acts 15:37–38). Whatever the reason, later tradition claims that Mark continued faithful in the gospel. Papias preserved the following information concerning Mark’s later relationship with Peter: “Mark became Peter’s interpreter and wrote down accurately, but not in order, all that [Peter] remembered of the things said and done by the Lord. For [Mark] had not heard the Lord or been one of his followers, but later, as I said, a follower of Peter. Peter used to teach as the occasion demanded, without giving systematic arrangement to the Lord’s sayings.”

If this tradition is accurate, Mark did not actually witness the events he included in his Gospel but rather wrote down the things he heard Peter teach about the Savior’s ministry. The importance, therefore, of Mark’s Gospel is that it may record the memories of the leader of the fledgling post-resurrection Church.

Internal evidence strongly suggests that the Gospel of Mark was written for a Gentile, or non-Jewish, audience. For example, Mark interprets Aramaic phrases for his readers, such as “Talitha cumi” (Mark 5:41) and “Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?” (Mark 15:34). Mark also explains Jewish customs and ideas. If Mark’s audience were Jewish and spoke Aramaic, there would be no need for such explanations. Significantly, Matthew, who was indeed writing to a Jewish audience, omits Mark’s explanations of these Jewish concepts in his Gospel.
Eusebius, a Christian historian from the fourth century, reported a tradition that Mark wrote his Gospel in Rome.\textsuperscript{16} Internal evidence from the text also supports this tradition. First, Mark mentions Roman customs,\textsuperscript{17} which Matthew omits.\textsuperscript{18} In addition, although Mark’s Gospel was composed in Greek, he often employs Latin terminology.\textsuperscript{19} He twice interprets Greek terms with Latin explanations.\textsuperscript{20} These features seem to indicate that Mark wrote his Gospel to a Gentile, possibly a Roman, audience.

Noteworthy themes and perspectives on Christ. Overall, the Gospel of Mark emphasizes that even though Christ’s enemies opposed Him, His mortal ministry was misunderstood (even by His disciples and relatives) and that although He died a humiliating death upon the cross, the Savior ultimately triumphed over all things. Although a number of themes recur throughout this Gospel, we will mention just four prominent examples. A large portion of the Gospel of Mark deals with the theme of Jesus’s authority, as well as opposition to that authority.

1. Rather than opening with a birth narrative, the Gospel of Mark begins with the Savior’s baptism by John the Baptist (see Mark 1:9–10). Thus, early in his Gospel, Mark establishes the Savior’s identity by quoting God the Father’s divine approval: “Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (Mark 1:11). This approval is the foundation from which Mark can demonstrate Jesus’s authority over Satan and his forces when Jesus casts out an unclean spirit (see Mark 1:23–26), cures the fever of Peter’s mother-in-law (see Mark 1:30–31), and heals the leper (see Mark 1:40–42). As the Savior asserts His authority, He meets intense opposition from Satan and his forces (Mark 1:12–13), the scribes and Pharisees (Mark 2:16–17), and eventually the chief priests (Mark 14:1). Examples of this theme of opposition are repeated throughout Mark’s Gospel.\textsuperscript{21}

2. The Gospel of Mark shows that misunderstanding affected Jesus on a deeply personal level. Although the Savior demonstrates His authority to the house of Israel, they do not completely understand His identity (see Mark 1:27; 4:11–12; 8:27–28). Notwithstanding the Savior’s commission to the Apostles to teach His message and use His authority (see Mark 3:14–15), His own disciples do not entirely comprehend His true identity, nor do they fully grasp the scope of His earthly mission (see Mark 4:36–41). When Jesus returns to His hometown of Nazareth, instead of receiving Him with open arms, the townspeople reject Him (see Mark 6:1–4). Perhaps most disturbing of all is that apparently members of Jesus’s own family rejected Him (see Mark 3:21).\textsuperscript{22} The Savior, of course, knew that such rejection would be the reaction to His message and mission. Just as John was “handed over” (\textit{paradidomi}) because of
his preaching, so would the Savior suffer the same fate (Mark 1:14; see also 14:41, where “betrayed” is also paradidomi). The parable of the sower also emphasizes the idea that most people would indeed reject the Savior (see Mark 4:3–8). 23

3. The Gospel of Mark emphasizes the idea of secrecy surrounding the Messiah’s mission. From the inception of His ministry, Jesus commands those that He encounters to keep quiet about Him. For example, when the Savior cast out an evil spirit, He declared, “Hold thy peace, and come out of him” (Mark 1:25). 24 After Jesus heals the leper, He commands, “See thou say nothing to any man” (Mark 1:44). Mark hints that Jesus is intentionally keeping people in the dark about certain aspects of His mission (see Mark 4:11–12). Even when Peter finally declares by inspiration Jesus’s true identity as the Messiah, the Savior “charged them that they should tell no man of him” (Mark 8:30). In addition, after the sacred experience upon the Mount of Transfiguration, the Savior again “charged them that they should tell no man what things they had seen” (Mark 9:9). Scholars since the early twentieth century have called this theme in Mark “the Messianic Secret.” 25

Why would Jesus command others to keep quiet? One reason is logistical—that is, if too many people crowded around the Savior, He simply could not accomplish His work as effectively. When the healed leper was commanded to keep quiet, he disobeyed “and began to publish it much, and to blaze abroad the matter” (Mark 1:45). The result of this disobedience was that “Jesus could no more openly enter into the city, but was without in desert places: and they came to him from every quarter” (Mark 1:45). A more important reason for the secrecy is apparent, however, because neither the disciples nor Jews in general understood what kind of Messiah Jesus was. Rather than being a powerful military or political figure, Jesus was to be a suffering Messiah. When Jesus started to teach His disciples about His messianic mission, their reactions demonstrate why Jesus kept it a secret for so long. After Peter’s famous confession, Jesus taught, “The Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders, and of the chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again” (Mark 8:31). Peter’s reaction is unexpected by modern readers: “And Peter took him, and began to rebuke him” (Mark 8:32). Even when Peter understood by revelation that Jesus was the Messiah, Peter still did not know what kind of Messiah Jesus was. Later, when Jesus told the disciples He would suffer and die (see Mark 9:31), still “they understood not that saying, and were afraid to ask him” (Mark 9:32). 26 According to Mark, nobody fully understood the
mission of the Savior before the suffering of Gethsemane and the cross.

4. Mark’s culminating theme is the Savior’s final vindication in spite of opposition, misunderstanding, and suffering. Each time Jesus taught His disciples that He would suffer and die, He included the important reality that He would also rise from the dead (see Mark 8:31; 9:31; and 10:34). Ironically, following Mark’s narration of the Crucifixion, the Roman centurion gives readers a glimmer of hope by declaring, “Truly this man was the Son of God” (Mark 15:39). The women take the body of Jesus and wrap it in linen (see Mark 15:46), but when they return to the sepulcher after the Sabbath, they find the stone already rolled away and a man inside dressed in white—but they do not find the body of Jesus (see Mark 16:4–5). The messenger confirms that Jesus’s prophecy is indeed fulfilled: “He is risen; he is not here” (Mark 16:6). The Savior of the world, who was opposed and misunderstood by all who knew Him and suffered and died a humiliating death, has triumphed over all things and has risen again! He appeared as a resurrected being to Mary Magdalene, two unnamed disciples, and finally to the Apostles (see Mark 16:9, 12, 14). The triumph of the Savior in the Gospel of Mark reaches its completion as “he was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God” (Mark 16:19).

In the early days of the New Testament church, Christian missionaries such as the Apostle Paul struggled to deal with the scandal caused by the Crucifixion: “But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness” (1 Corinthians 1:23). Why didn’t more people readily accept Jesus the crucified Messiah? Mark’s Gospel offered an explanation—from the beginning, people completely misunderstood the nature of the Savior’s mission. Mark’s Gospel also offered hope—in spite of continued misunderstanding and opposition to the message of the Savior, Jesus Christ has risen from the dead and rules, vindicated, in heaven. In these respects, the Gospel of Mark is as relevant today as ever.

The Gospel of Matthew

The Gospel of Matthew was very influential among early Christians. Tertullian, one of the early church fathers (c. AD 155–230), describes Matthew as the “most faithful chronicler of the Gospel.” In this dispensation, the Prophet Joseph Smith often used the first Gospel in his sermons.

Dating, authorship, and provenance. Because of Matthew’s dependence on Mark’s Gospel, the Gospel of Matthew is normally dated after about AD 75. Most scholars date it to sometime between AD 80 and
95. Although modern scholars have debated the authorship of this Gospel, ancient Christian writers are unanimous in ascribing it to the tax collector named Matthew identified in Matthew 9:9. Although we may never be able to identify a specific community in a specific city as Matthew’s intended audience, clues from both external and internal evidence help us draw some broad conclusions. Although we do not know his source, Eusebius says, “Matthew at first preached to the Hebrews, and when he planned to go to others also he wrote his Gospel in his own native tongue for those he was leaving.”

Internal evidence from the Gospel itself seems to confirm that the intended audience was Jewish. Unlike Mark, Matthew does not explain Jewish concepts for his audience, such as the washing of hands (15:2) and the use of phylacteries (23:5); he uses Aramaic terms such as raka (5:22) and korbanas (27:6, translated as “treasury”), without any explanation; and he prefers Jewish phrases such as “kingdom of heaven” (thirty-two times) instead of “kingdom of God.” In addition, Matthew begins his work with a genealogy that links Jesus with the royal Davidic line and with Abraham, the father of the covenant (see Matthew 1:1–17).

In the text, three characteristics of Matthew’s editorial hand suggest that his audience was in tension with, or had recently split with, the synagogue. Matthew is the only Gospel author to include Jesus’s sayings where he referred to the “church” (ekklēsia; Matthew 16:18; 18:17), and in his editorial passages, the synagogue is always referred to as “their” or “your” synagogue (Matthew 4:23; 9:35; 12:9; 13:54; 23:34). Additionally, Matthew referred to “their scribes” (authors’ translation of grammateis auton; Matthew 7:29), whereas Mark used “the scribes” (hoi grammateis; Mark 1:22). All these Matthean characteristics point to an “us” and “them” situation for Matthew’s audience. Some scholars have argued that this situation reflects a time during the Jamnian period (AD 70–100) when Judaism was seeking to define itself after the destruction of the temple. Rifts within Judaism, however, were not exclusive to this period and may reflect an earlier period.

The tension with the synagogue may account for an important element of Matthew’s Gospel: the tension over the role of the Gentiles within the Christian community. Matthew is the only Gospel author to mention two of Jesus’s sayings that restrict missionary work among the Gentiles. The first is in the apostolic commission in Matthew 10 where Jesus specifically directs the Twelve, “Go not into the way of the Gentiles and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not: But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (vv. 5–6). The second is Jesus’s response to the Syro-Phoenician woman who pled with him
to heal her daughter in chapter 15. He told His disciples, “I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (v. 24). These sayings, however, are offset in the Gospel with a number of places that emphasize the positive qualities of the Gentiles: Matthew includes four Gentile women in his account of Jesus’s genealogy (Thamar, Rachab, Ruth, and Bathsheba, or “the wife of Urias,” 1:3–6); he portrays the Wise Men as Gentiles who recognize and worship the Christ child when Herod and the chief priests and scribes do not; and he is the only Gospel writer to emphasize the great faith of two Gentiles—the centurion (8:10–12) and the Syro-Phoenician woman (15:28). These instances, along with the final commission to go and teach “all nations” (28:19), suggest that Matthew’s Gospel was written to encourage his Jewish audience to accept and embrace the Gentile mission.

This reading of Matthew makes good sense of Eusebius’s statement that Matthew wrote his Gospel “when he planned to go to others also.”

**Noteworthy themes and perspectives on Christ.** Matthew wrote his Gospel to testify that Jesus is a tangible manifestation that God has not abandoned His people. Matthew is the only Gospel author to provide an *inclusio*—two bookends that tie together the theme of his Gospel. At the beginning, he records the angel’s declaration that the Christ child should be called “Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us” (Matthew 1:23). It is through the coming of this child that God will be manifest among His people. The Savior’s teachings and miracles are manifestations of God’s love and power. Then the Gospel’s concluding verse records His final words to the disciples, “I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world” (Matthew 28:20). Even though He was physically leaving them, He, as God, would continue to be with them. Everything within Matthew’s Gospel must be understood within this framework. We will briefly discuss just two aspects of Matthew’s portrayal of Jesus: His fulfillment of the Old Testament and His role as the Messiah.

1. Matthew uses a number of literary techniques to show that Jesus was the fulfillment of the Old Testament. For example, he goes to great lengths to demonstrate that Jesus fulfills Old Testament prophecy. In some cases, he employs a specific quotation formula—variations of which were “to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet.” In each of these cases, the quotation is either inserted into Markan passages or is found in unique Matthean material. He also records numerous other scripture references without the quotation formula. During the description of Jesus’s arrest, Matthew specifically records Him saying, “But all this was done, that the scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled” (Matthew 26:56; emphasis added).
Matthew portrays Jesus as the new Moses. He does so in three ways. First, he is the only Gospel author to include the account of Joseph taking his family into Egypt (see Matthew 2:13–23). Second, he is the only author who records that Jesus, like Moses, gave a new law on a mountain (see Matthew 5:1). In contrast, Luke records the sermon that is given on a plain (Luke 6:17). Third, just as Moses wrote five books of the Torah, Matthew records Jesus giving five sermons: the Sermon on the Mount (chapters 5–7), the Apostolic Commission (chapter 10), the Parable Discourse (chapter 13), the Community Rules Discourse (chapter 18), and the Olivet Discourse (chapters 24–25). It is evident that Matthew intended his audience to link these speeches together because at the end of each of the first four sermons, he writes, “and when Jesus had ended these sayings/parables . . .” (7:28; 11:1; 13:53; 19:1); but at the end of the final speech, he writes, “when Jesus had finished all these sayings . . .” (26:1; emphasis added).46

In addition to these carefully developed ties with the Old Testament, Matthew makes numerous allusions to Old Testament themes and practices. The testing of Jesus in the wilderness after His baptism reminds readers of Israel’s testing in the wilderness in Deuteronomy, and His discussions on the Sabbath and responses to the Pharisees in chapter 12 are all rooted in the Old Testament. As one New Testament scholar notes, in all of this, “the fuller [the readers’] knowledge of the Old Testament, the richer will be their understanding of the significance of Jesus as he is presented in Matthew’s pages.”47

Matthew also shows that Jesus is the fulfillment of the law of Moses—not in a way that negates or minimizes the law but in a way that “raises the bar.”48 Here we must be careful to differentiate between the law and the “fences around the law”—or the oral tradition that the Pharisees developed. Matthew records numerous occasions when Jesus denounces the oral traditions. The most scathing is found in Matthew 23.49 But Jesus’s teachings about the law itself are very different. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus emphasizes that He expects a higher level of righteousness. Two verses again act as bookends. In Matthew 5:20, Jesus declares, “For I say unto you, That except your righteousness [δικαιοσύνη] shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.” Then, in the first verse of chapter 6, we read, “Take heed that ye do not your righteousness [δικαιοσύνη] before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven” (authors’ translation). In between these two verses, we have the six antitheses: “Ye have heard . . . but I say unto you . . .” (Matthew 5:21–48). In each of these
antitheses, the “ye have heard” portion refers to the teachings of the law, whereas the “but I say unto you” portion refers to the “raising of the bar” that Jesus expects from His disciples. Righteousness, therefore, is not a product of Pharisaic legalism; rather, it is in the “weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith” (Matthew 23:23).

2. Matthew’s portrayal of Jesus as the Messiah is complex. He uses titles such as “Christ,” or “anointed one,” “the Son of Man,” “King of the Jews [or Israel],” and “Son of God.” Each of these titles has powerful ties with Old Testament expectation. One title, however, is particularly important in the first half of his Gospel, although this title was not prominent in Jewish messianic expectation: Jesus is the “Coming One.” This title influences the way Matthew composes chapters 3–11. The title “Coming One” is closely tied to two important passages dealing with John the Baptist. The first, in Matthew 3, describes John preaching and baptizing in the Judean wilderness. After some Pharisees and Sadducees request to be baptized, John condemns them as a “generation of vipers” because they believe that salvation is assured by their lineal descent from Abraham. John, however, declares that unless they bring forth fruits of repentance, they will be “hewn down, and cast into the fire” (Matthew 3:7–10). Then John declares, “I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but the coming one [ho erxomenos] [who is] after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize with the Holy Ghost, and with fire” (v. 11; authors’ translation). In contrast to Matthew, Mark (1:7) and Luke (3:16) do not use ho erxomenos in their accounts. Matthew makes no explicit mention here of the identity of the “Coming One,” although he implies that it refers to Jesus by following the prophecy with the description of Jesus’s baptism.

The next reference to John the Baptist in Matthew’s Gospel is found in chapter 11. By this time, John was in prison and sent his disciples to Jesus to inquire if He was the Coming One (ho erxomenos) (v. 3). Immediately, the reader is reminded of Matthew’s account of John’s earlier prophecy to the Pharisees and Sadducees. Jesus did not answer John’s disciples directly. Instead, He told them, “Go and shew John again those things which ye do hear and see: The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them” (verses 4–5). Jesus’s response is significant for a number of reasons. First, it portrays the “Coming One” in a different light than John’s expectation in Matthew 3:10 where He is an axe who will hew down any tree that does not bring forth good fruit. In Matthew 11,
however, Jesus is the “Coming One” who heals and preaches. This outcome was not a common messianic expectation in Jesus’s day.⁵²

This portrayal of a healing and preaching Messiah influenced the Matthean order in chapters 5–9. Matthew identified these chapters as a single literary unit by using verse 23 of chapter 4 and verse 35 of chapter 9 as bookends. The language of both verses is almost identical. These chapters, in chiastic format, provide the evidence for Jesus being the expected “Coming One.” The evidence that Jesus taught the gospel to the poor is the Sermon on the Mount, where the opening line is “Blessed are the poor” (Matthew 5:3). Prior to Matthew 11, the opening beatitude is the only verse that uses the word “poor” (ptōskoi).⁵³ Likewise, Matthew 8–9 offers specific examples of Christ healing the blind, the lame, the lepers, and the deaf (see Matthew 11:5).⁵⁴ It appears that Matthew arranged the material in chapters 5–9 to provide evidence for his readers that Jesus was indeed the “Coming One.”

Matthew, therefore, highlights the truth that God is with His people. Jesus’s coming to earth was the fulfillment of a plan that had been in place from the very beginning. Israel may have rejected their God, but He had not rejected His people, even though the Gentiles would have a place in His kingdom. Instead of coming as a judge, which He will do at the end of time, God first sent His Son to teach and heal His people, both physically and spiritually.

The Gospel of Luke

The longest Gospel account is written by Luke. This Gospel is actually the first volume of a two-volume set, and the two volumes were meant to be read together—the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts. Luke addresses both books to a person by the name of “Theophilus” (Luke 1:3 and Acts 1:1). Because the name Theophilus was common among both Jews and Gentiles in the Greco-Roman world, most scholars conclude that Theophilus was a real person whom Luke knew personally.⁵⁵ However, because the Theophilus means “friend of God,” we can also apply it to ourselves as we read Luke’s writings—we are also friends of God who are being invited to seek the truth about the Savior in Luke’s Gospel.

Dating, authorship, and provenance. The dating of the Gospel of Luke, like that of Matthew, depends on the dating of the Gospel of Mark. If Mark wrote his Gospel sometime between AD 66 and 73 and if Luke used the Gospel of Mark as a source, then Luke must have written his Gospel after AD 75. Many scholars, therefore, date the Gospel
of Luke to sometime between AD 80 and 90. Scholars do not agree on the place where Luke composed his Gospel, although various cities outside of Palestine have been proposed.

Early Christian tradition preserved in the Muratorian Canon fragment of the second century states that Luke was a doctor and a missionary companion of the Apostle Paul: “This physician Luke, after Christ’s ascension, since Paul had taken him with him as a companion of his travels, composed it in his own name according to his thinking. Yet neither did he himself see the Lord in the flesh.” Because of this tradition, the Gospel writer is normally identified with Luke the physician who is mentioned in Paul’s letters (see Colossians 4:14; see also Philemon 1:24; 2 Timothy 4:11). Like the Muratorian Canon, Luke himself says that he was not an eyewitness to the mortal ministry of the Savior (see Luke 1:1–3) but apparently was a disciple who converted after the Resurrection. A few sections in the book of Acts are narrated in the first person rather than the third person. Some scholars conclude that these first-person accounts are evidence that Luke was personally present during parts of Paul’s second and third missionary journeys.

The Gospel of Luke, like the Gospel of Mark, seems intended for a predominantly Gentile audience. Luke shows an interest in those things that may have been a concern in a non-Jewish culture. For example, whereas the genealogy of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew begins with Abraham, the father of the Jews, the genealogy of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke goes all the way back to Adam, the father of humanity. Luke’s contrast emphasizes that Jesus was the Savior for all the world and not just for literal descendants of Abraham. Luke also commonly omits elements in the Markan source that would have been of interest primarily to a Jewish audience, including some Jewish religious traditions as well as some Hebrew or Aramaic names or titles.

Further evidence that Luke was writing for a Gentile audience is his geographical terminology and emphases. First, sometimes Luke uses the term “Judea”—not in the specific sense of the province south of Galilee and Samaria but in a generic sense of the whole of Palestine, including Samaria and Galilee. Judea was the most famous area in Palestine. This wording may indicate that Luke’s intended audience was not as familiar with the less-well-known geographical areas. In addition, Luke seems to emphasize the most famous city of Judaism, Jerusalem. For instance, both the Gospels of Matthew and of Luke include the three temptations of the Savior in the wilderness. But whereas Matthew concludes the Savior’s triumph over the temptations on a high mountain in the wilderness (see Matthew 4:8–10), Luke’s account culminates...

**Noteworthy themes and perspectives on Christ.** The Gospel of Luke possesses a number of striking themes.

1. One of Luke’s most important motifs is that Jesus Christ is the universal Savior of all mankind.\(^{64}\) He stresses that the gospel is for everyone, not just for the privileged of society or the literal descendants of the house of Israel. One of the most noteworthy examples of this theme is Luke’s emphasis on the importance of faithful women who played essential roles as disciples of the Savior. Comparing Matthew’s and Luke’s birth narratives, we can observe that Matthew emphasizes Joseph’s point of view (see Matthew 1:19–25). Luke’s version, however, includes sacred experiences from the perspective of His mother, Mary (see Luke 1:26–38), as well as the testimonies of Elisabeth (see Luke 1:39–45) and Anna (see Luke 2:36–38). Luke is the only Gospel writer to mention that faithful women disciples accompanied Jesus and His Apostles and “ministered unto him of their substance” (Luke 8:1–3). Both the Gospels of John and Luke contain important information about Jesus’s disciples Mary and Martha, but Luke is the only one who includes the Savior’s praise of Mary for choosing the “good part” by carefully listening to the teachings of the Master (Luke 10:42). Like the Gospel of Mark, the Gospel of Luke also shows that faithful women disciples were witnesses of the Savior’s death (Luke 23:49) and the ones who were entrusted to declare to the Apostles the wonderful news that He had risen from the dead (Luke 23:55–56; 24:1–10).\(^{65}\)

In addition to the special notice paid to women, Luke emphasizes the universal nature of the Savior’s ministry by highlighting His concern for the poor and outcast. Whereas Matthew’s Sermon on the Mount presents Jesus’s teaching, “Blessed are the poor in spirit” (Matthew 5:3), Luke’s Sermon at the Plain reads, “Blessed be ye poor” (Luke 6:20). In another comparison, Matthew records, “Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house” (Matthew 5:15; emphasis added). The statement “in the house” may be a veiled reference to Jewish converts, who are already literally in the house of Israel. In contrast, Luke contains the following: “No man, when he hath lighted a candle, putteth it in a secret place, neither under a bushel, but on a candlestick, that they which come in may see the light” (Luke
The conclusion, “they which come in,” may be a veiled reference to Gentile converts who, although not literal descendants of Israel, “come in” to the fold by baptism.66 Whereas the other Gospels include the Savior’s commission of His Apostles to teach the gospel, only Luke also includes the commission of the Seventy to further the work of teaching the gospel to everyone (see Luke 10:1–12).67 This theme is continued throughout the book of Acts as the disciples become witnesses of the Savior “both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

2. Luke further emphasizes the fact that the spreading of the message of the Savior was not left to chance but was the will of God carried out through the power of the Holy Spirit. Luke’s is the only Gospel that begins with prophecies that John the Baptist will prepare the way before the Messiah and that the Savior Himself would be born—all by the power of the Spirit (see Luke 1:15, 35). Elisabeth was filled with the Spirit at the salutation of Mary (see Luke 1:41). Both Zacharias and Simeon were filled with the Spirit when they prophesied concerning John and Jesus respectively (see Luke 1:67; 2:25–27). The Savior, who was filled with the Spirit (see Luke 3:22), came to baptize others with that same Spirit (see Luke 3:16). The Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness to triumph over Satan (see Luke 4:1). The mighty deeds of the Savior are continually performed by the power of the Spirit (see Luke 4:14, 18). Jesus powerfully proclaims that God is willing to give the Spirit to His children (see Luke 11:13) but also warns of the serious consequences for those who speak blasphemy against the Spirit (see Luke 12:10).

3. The Gospel of Luke places a heavy emphasis on Jerusalem and the temple as focal points of the Savior’s life and ministry. Luke is the only Gospel writer to include the important events that take place at the temple in Jerusalem just prior to and after the birth of John the Baptist and Jesus. While Zacharias was performing his priestly duties in the temple, the angel Gabriel appeared to him to announce that Zacharias and his wife would have a son in their old age (Luke 1:5–22). After Jesus was circumcised, Jesus’s parents brought Him to the temple, where Simeon and Anna testified concerning the Savior (Luke 2:22–38). When Jesus was twelve years old, His parents brought Him to Jerusalem for the Passover, and in the temple, the young boy astonished the doctors of the law with His understanding (see Luke 2:42–48).68 As mentioned above, whereas Matthew culminates the triumph of Jesus over the temptations of the devil in the wilderness (see Matthew 4:8–10), Luke does so at the temple in Jerusalem (see Luke 4:9–13). Like the other synoptic Gospels, Luke includes Jesus’s
admission to His disciples that He must suffer and die and rise again (see Luke 9:22; 9:44), but only Luke also includes the teaching that these things “he should accomplish at Jerusalem” (Luke 9:31).

4. Although the bulk of the Savior’s ministry occurred in Galilee, Luke shows how the attention of Jesus is riveted on the mission He must accomplish in Jerusalem. After Jesus taught His disciples concerning His death, “he stedfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem” (Luke 9:51). Luke’s narrative from chapter 9 onward concentrates the reader’s attention on the holy city. As Jesus continues His mission, preaching and performing miracles, Luke reminds readers that the Savior never lost focus as “he went through the cities and villages, teaching, and journeying toward Jerusalem” (Luke 13:22). When He arrives in Jerusalem, the Savior teaches the people in various ways.

More than any other Gospel, Luke shows that the Savior of the world met His foreordained fate with dignity and bravery. Luke presents Jesus Christ as the Savior of the world, just as the prophet Jacob testified: “He cometh into the world that he may save all men if they will hearken to his voice; for behold, he suffereth the pains of all men, yea, the pains of every living creature, both men, women, and children, who belong to the family of Adam” (2 Nephi 9:21).

**The Gospel of John**

The Gospel of John is unique among the four Gospels. In antiquity, it was the last of the Gospels to be recognized by the orthodox church, and scholarship once doubted its historical reliability as a purveyor of Jesus’s words and deeds, preferring the synoptic Gospels. In recent years, however, the scholarly pendulum has swung in favor of the reliability of the fourth Gospel. Archaeology has found and has excavated the pool of Bethesda with its five porches (see John 5:1–2). The Dead Sea Scrolls show that John’s use of dualism between light and darkness (see John 1:5; 3:19; 12:35–36), which some scholars attributed to second-century philosophy, is at home in the Palestinian milieu of the first century. In addition, John’s knowledge of Samaritan beliefs, of worship on Mount Gerizim, and of the site of Jacob’s well are all accurate.

**Dating, authorship, and provenance.** In its present form, John’s Gospel probably dates from AD 90 to 110. The terminus ad quem (the latest possible date) can be fairly accurately calculated because of the discovery of a small piece of papyrus containing parts of John 18:31–33, 37–38. This papyrus, known as p52, was discovered in Egypt in 1935 and dates to circa AD 125. It is the earliest New Testament manuscript fragment
discovered thus far. Scholars believe that P52 is a copy rather than the original document. Therefore, they have arrived at the *terminus ad quem* by factoring in time for the original document to have been copied and taken to Egypt. However, we should note that the Gospel of John also contains material that dates to a much earlier period.

The fourth Gospel received its name because the majority, but not all, of the early Christian witnesses understood the author to be the unnamed disciple who leaned upon the Savior’s breast during the Last Supper (see John 13:23). The Gospel itself makes this claim in John 21:20–24. The early Christians identified that disciple as the Apostle John. Modern readers, however, should realize that John’s Gospel, like the synoptic Gospels, shows that others also took part in shaping our present version. For example, John the Baptist, rather than John the Apostle, seems to have been responsible for much of the material contained in John 1. Verse 19 states that what follows in verses 20–34 is the record of John, and the context clearly identifies John as the Baptist, not the Apostle. In addition, Doctrine and Covenants 93 strongly suggests that the prologue (see John 1:1–18) also belongs to John the Baptist (vv. 6–18). It is not unusual that the Apostle included the account of John the Baptist given that he was first a disciple of the Baptist’s.

Others may possibly have had a hand in the final form of the Gospel as it has come down to us in the New Testament. For example, John 21:24 reads, “This is the disciple which testifieth of these things, and wrote these things: and we know that his testimony is true” (emphasis added).

**Noteworthy themes and perspectives on Christ.** In antiquity, Clement of Alexandria wrote that John, “aware that the external details had been recorded in the Gospels, was urged by his disciples, and divinely moved by the Spirit, to compose a spiritual Gospel.” Scholars likewise acknowledge that Gospel of John has a “high Christology,” a term indicating that the divine element of Jesus is emphasized. We see Jesus making frequent, specific declarations of His divine nature and messianic responsibilities. The brevity of this article does not allow a discussion of all the noteworthy themes in the fourth Gospel, so we have highlighted just four.

1. Unlike the synoptic Gospels, John includes a prologue with an account of Jesus in the premortal existence (see John 1:1–14). In the premortal existence, Jesus was the *logos*, the Word of God. As such, he was with God and, in fact, was God (1:1; see also Abraham 3:24); He was the creator of the world and the source of life and light for mankind (John 1:4). Why does John use the metaphor of the “Word” to introduce his Gospel? Doctrine and Covenants 93:8 defines the
Word as “the messenger of salvation.” In John’s Gospel, however, the emphasis of how Jesus brings salvation is different from the synoptic Gospels. For example, John does not include a description of the sacrament. His sacramental teachings come in the Bread of Life discourse in chapter 6. Neither does John give a description of the Gethsemane experience. Rather, he includes a description of Jesus’s washing of the Twelve’s feet (John 13; cf. D&C 88:137–141) as the symbol of His sacrifice on our behalf.

The point of the prologue is that the *logos* was made flesh; He condescended to come to earth.” Although He is the one who comes “from above” and does not belong to this world (see John 3:31; 8:23), His ministry on earth is to help those who belong to this world to raise their sights and see as He sees. Throughout John’s Gospel, therefore, we find Jesus in numerous conversations with those who belong to this world: His mother (see John 2:1–4), Nicodemus (see John 3:1–13), the Samaritan woman (see John 4:7–25), and the Pharisees (see John 8:12–59). In each case, He uses the conversation to help His earthly dialogue partners raise their sights to recognize who He is and also to help them come to know the Father. When He speaks, He reveals the words of God (John 8:40; 14:10, 24); when He acts, He performs the will of God (see John 4:34; 5:30; 6:38). Thus, as Doctrine and Covenants 93 notes, He becomes the messenger of salvation because He reveals the Father to us (see D&C 93:8, 19). “And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day” (John 6:40).

2. A second theme introduced in the prologue is the contrast between light and darkness, appearing first in John 1:4–5. “In him [the Word] was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in the darkness; and the darkness comprehendeth it not.” We have already noted that the dualism between light and darkness is important for John’s Gospel. Jesus is the source of all light, and because light is essential for life to exist, He is also the source of all life. Darkness, by definition, is the absence of light, so if Christ is represented by the metaphor of light, Satan is represented by the metaphor of darkness. Therefore, when John records that Nicodemus came to Jesus “by night,” he is making a statement about Nicodemus (see John 3:2; 7:50)—one that Jesus calls attention to in John 3:19, “And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.” Therefore, we should not be surprised when John emphasizes that when Judas left to betray Jesus, “it was night” (John 19:39).
In contrast to the darkness, the Gospel of John records poignant statements about light. At the Feast of Tabernacles, Jesus publicly declared, “I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life” (John 8:12). Later, He taught the people, “Yet a little while is the light with you. Walk while ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you: for he that walketh in darkness knoweth not whither he goeth. While ye have light, believe in the light, that ye may be the children of light. . . . I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness” (John 12:35–36, 46).

3. A third theme introduced in the prologue builds on conflict between light and darkness. This theme is not readily apparent in the King James Translation of John 1:5. The word translated into English as “comprehendeth” is the third singular aorist active indicative verb: katalambanō. In its most basic sense, it means to “overcome” or to “seize.” If verse 5 is read with this translation, it describes the conflict between light and darkness before the world began: “And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness did not overcome it [that is, the Light].” Thus, John begins his Gospel with a description of the War in Heaven. One of his major emphases here and in the book of Revelation is that although Satan has power to wage war with the Light in the premortal life and here on earth, he could not overcome it there, and neither will he be able to do so in mortality.

4. The fourth theme we will mention is Jesus’s declaration that He is the “I AM.” The most significant declaration is in John 8, where Jesus has been in conversation with the Jews over the issue of the seed of Abraham. The Jews claimed Abraham for their father, but Jesus denied their claim: “If ye were Abraham’s children, ye would do the works of Abraham. But now ye seek to kill me, a man that hath told you the truth, which I have heard of God: this did not Abraham” (vv. 39–40). Rather, He continues, “Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning and abode not in truth because there was no truth in him” (v. 44). In contrast, “Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad” (v. 56).

This conversation is another example where the one from above has a conversation with earthly dialogue partners who have a very limited perspective. When the Jews challenged Jesus by saying, “Thou art not fifty years old, and hast thou seen Abraham?” Jesus responds with the famous statement, “Before Abraham was, I am [ἐγώ εἰμι]” (vv. 57–58). Jesus claims that He was the Jehovah of the Old Testa-
ment (see Exodus 3:11–14). This time it is clear that His dialogue partners understood exactly what He was saying because “then took they up stones to cast at him.” Declaring Himself to be Jehovah was tantamount to blasphemy in their eyes, and they responded accordingly. The only other time they try to stone Him in John’s Gospel is when He declares, “I and my Father are one” (John 10:30–31).

In John’s Gospel, however, are found several other places where Jesus identifies Himself as the I AM. Some of the sayings, like 8:58, use *ego eimi* in an independent sense without a predicate but are not translated as such in the King James Version. For example, when Jesus converses with the Samaritan woman at the well, she declares, “I know that Messias comes, which is called Christ: when he is come, he will tell us all things” (John 4:25). The King James Version translates His response as, “I that speak unto thee am he” (John 4:26). This translation, however, does not do justice to the *ego eimi*. A more literal translation is, “I am, the one who speaks to you.” Likewise, when Jesus walked on the water toward His disciples, He says, “It is I; be not afraid.” But the literal translation is, “I am; be not afraid” (John 6:20). In a number of other sayings, *ego eimi* is used with a predicate. Scholars have long suggested that in these, Jesus uses *ego eimi* to make a statement of His divinity. Thus, Jesus declares *ego eimi* “the Bread of Life” (6:35), “the light of the world” (8:12; 9:5), “the door” (10:7, 9), “the good shepherd” (10:11), “the resurrection and the life” (11:25), “the way and the truth and the life” (14:5), and “the true vine” (15:1).

The Gospel of John is very different from the synoptic Gospels, but it provides a powerful witness of the identity and ministry of Jesus Christ. The prologue provides the platform from which John builds his testimony of the Savior. In addition, we have seen how the numerous “I AM” references bear frequent testimony that Jesus is the Jehovah of the Old Testament. There is no messianic secret in John’s Gospel. Rather, it was written that all of us “might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing [we] might have life through his name” (John 20:31).

**Conclusion**

Students and teachers have much to gain by considering how each Gospel highlights individual aspects of the Savior’s ministry and paints an individual portrait of the Savior. When the authors sat down to compose their texts, they fully intended that each would be read as a complete and independent document, not just one part of an amalgamation of Jesus’s life. Although the creation of a harmony of Jesus’s life
is a useful aid, it has significant limitations. Concerning this, Richard Neitzel Holzapfel made the following analogy:

If we had four mosaics giving different representations of the same scene, it would not occur to us to say, “These mosaics are so beautiful that I do not want to lose any of them; I shall demolish them and use the enormous pile of stones to make a single mosaic that combines all four of them.” Trying to combine the pieces would be an outrageous affront to the artists. Because the four Gospels are different from each other, we must study each one for itself, without demolishing it and using the debris to reconstruct a life of Jesus by making the four Gospels into one Gospel.

We cannot, given the limitation of space, describe in detail all the nuances of each Gospel writer’s testimony of Christ. Rather, we have endeavored to focus a spotlight on a few of the individual contributions of each of the Gospels, hoping that readers will have the desire to add an additional dimension to their study of Christ in the New Testament. We submit that, even in classes that use a harmony approach, an understanding of the distinctive testimonies of the four Gospel authors will reward both the teacher and the students.

Notes

1. This is the approach used, for example, in James E. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1915); Bruce R. McConkie, *The Mortal Messiah*, 4 vols. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1979–81); and Church Educational System, *The Life and Teachings of Jesus and His Apostles* (Religion 211–12) (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1978).


6. For example, Luke places John the Baptist’s imprisonment (3:19–20) before the baptism of Jesus (3:21–22). In Mark and Matthew, the imprisonment takes place
some time after the baptism (Mark 6:17–29; Matthew 14:3–12). In this instance, logic favors the chronology presented by Mark and Matthew over that of Luke. In other instances, the decision is not so straightforward. For example, in Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus raises Jairus’s daughter immediately after John’s disciples ask about fasting (see Matthew 9:14–19, 23–26), but in Mark’s and Luke’s Gospels, the two events are separated by three chapters (Mark 2:18–22; 5:22–24, 35–43; Luke 5:33–39; 8:41–56). Determining the chronology in this instance is much more difficult.


9. Together, Matthew, Mark, and Luke are often referred to as the synoptic Gospels. The term *synoptic* means to “see with” or “see together,” so the synoptic Gospels present the life of the Savior in similar ways. The similarities are so significant that many scholars have proposed a literary relationship among the first three Gospels. The most common explanation for this literary relationship posits that Mark’s Gospel was written first (known as Markan Priority) and that Matthew and Luke then used the Gospel of Mark as a source for their own accounts (see Robert H. Stein, *Studying the Synoptic Gospels: Origin and Interpretation*, 2nd ed. [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2001], 49–96).

Although not all scholars are convinced by this explanation, three points in particular make this conclusion plausible. First, Matthew and Luke generally follow the Markan sequence of events, even though Papias said that Mark did not record them in precise chronological order. When Matthew and Luke disagree with Mark’s chronology, the differences can usually be explained as a result of Matthean and Lukan editorial tendencies. Significantly, Matthew and Luke never agree on the sequence of events when they differ from Mark.


Third, one reason for concluding that the Gospel of Mark is the earliest Gospel is the fact that it is the shortest. It is more likely that Matthew and Luke later added additional material about the life of Christ than that Mark purposefully omitted so many good stories about the Savior. On the contrary, Mark does not tend to shorten stories because when Matthew, Mark, and Luke contain the same story, Mark often preserves the longest version. For examples, see Stein, *Studying the Synoptic Gospels*, 50–56.


14. Recall in Mark 12:42 that Mark explains the Jewish coin “mite” by referring to the Roman coin “farthing.” See also Mark 7:1–4 where Mark mentions that the Pharisees were upset with the disciples for not washing their hands before eating and then explains in some detail the Jewish concern for cleanliness with respect to eating and cooking.
15. Compare, for example, Mark 7:1–4 with Matthew 15:1–2.
16. “When, by the Spirit, Peter had publicly proclaimed the Gospel in Rome, his many hearers urged Mark, as one who had followed him for years and remembered what was said, to put it all in writing. This he did and gave copies to all who asked. When Peter learned of it, he neither objected nor promoted it” (Eusebius, *Church History*, 6.14.6–7).
17. For example, Mark mentions the Roman custom of four watches during the night (see Mark 6:48; 13:35). Mark also alludes to the Roman law that allowed wives to divorce their husbands (see Mark 10:11–12).
18. Compare, for example, Mark 13:35 with Matthew 24:42 and also Mark 10:11–12 with Matthew 19:9. Significantly, Jewish law contains no allowance for wives to divorce their husbands (see Deuteronomy 24:1).
21. A nice summary of these issues can be found in Donald H. Juel, *A Master of Surprise: Mark Interpreted* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994).
22. The King James Version translation “his friends” (literally “those of him” in the Greek) does not seem to take into consideration the complete context and probably should be translated as “relatives.” A few verses later, the group that was seeking Him is identified as His family (see Mark 3:31–32). Jesus himself asserted that “A prophet is not without honor, but in his own country, and among his own kin, and in his own house” (Mark 6:4; emphasis added). In any event, John’s Gospel confirms that at least Jesus’s brothers rejected Him during His mortal ministry (see John 7:3–5).
24. Ironically, in Mark’s Gospel, the demons are the only individuals who actually understand Jesus’s identity (see Mark 1:24) before the crucifixion (compare Mark 15:39).
26. Jesus teaches the disciples a third time about His imminent suffering and death, but Mark does not record the reaction (see Mark 10:33–34).

28. It seems to have been referred to by Peter (2 Peter 1:16–18) and James (James 1:13; 2:13; 3:5–6, 18; 4:8, 11; 5:12), although they may be using a similar source. It is quoted in the writings of Ignatius (To the Ephesians 14.2; To the Smyrnecans 1.1; 6.1; To Polycarp 2.2), and the Didache (1.4; 3.7; 7.1; 8.2; 9.5; 13.2). It was the only book of scripture used by the Ebionites (Irenaeus, Against Heresies 1.26.2), and the Valentinians, Marcionites, and Basilidians also taught from it (Clement, Stromata 7.17).


31. The earliest fragments of Matthew’s Gospel (\(^{\text{p64}}\) and \(^{\text{p67}}\)) date from the late second century. Scholars now recognize that both of these papyri belong to the same manuscript (see Bruce M. Metzger and Bart D. Ehrman, The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration, 4th ed. [New York: Oxford University Press, 2005], 53).


33. For one discussion of the issues of authorship, see Ulrich Luz, Matthew 1–7: A Continental Commentary, trans. Wilhelm C. Linss (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 93–95. The unanimity among ancient authors is significant because at times they did question the authorship of texts (see Eusebius, Church History, 3.3.1–5; 6.14.1–3).

34. Eusebius, Church History, 3.24.6.

35. Eusebius preserves a famous statement from Papias, which reads: “Matthew compiled the sayings [logia of Christ] in the Hebrew dialect, and each interpreted them as best he could” (Church History, 3.39.16). Although many scholars have interpreted this statement as referring to Matthew’s Gospel, there are major difficulties with doing so because it was written in Greek, not Hebrew. The phrase “in the Hebrew language” may mean “in Jewish forms of expression” (see Graham N. Stanton, A Gospel for a New People: Studies in Matthew [Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992], 116).

36. In Matthew 4:23, Matthew may be using the Markan phrase “their synagogues” (Mark 1:39), but, unlike Mark, Matthew repeats it in 9:35. In the other instances, Matthew has added the pronoun to the Markan passages (Matthew 12:9; 13:54). There is no Markan parallel for Matthew 23:34.


39. Bruce R. McConkie suggests that the Wise Men were probably diaspora Jews (The Mortal Messiah: From Bethlehem to Calvary, 1:358). This opinion may indeed be the case, but for Matthew, they were Gentiles. In Matthew’s Gospel, only Gentiles use the phrase “King of the Jews” (see Matthew 27:11, 29, 37). In
contrast, the scribes and elders called Him mockingly “King of Israel” (Matthew 27:42).

40. For a more extensive discussion, see Gaye Strathearn, “Jesus and the Gentiles,” in The Life and Teachings of Jesus Christ, 2:302–17.

41. Eusebius, Church History, 3.24.6.

42. Luke also makes reference to the idea that Jesus was the fulfillment of the Old Testament—but to a much lesser degree (see Luke 4:21; 21:22, 32; 22:16; 24:44).


44. Luz, Matthew 1–7, 156.


46. This literary practice was first identified by B. W. Bacon, Studies in Matthew (New York: Holt, 1930).


50. In Mark and Luke, we have the articular use of the substantive comparative adjective ἵσυρος as the subject of the conjugated definite verb erxomai, whereas Matthew uses the nominal substantive attributive participle of erxomai with the present indicative of the verb εἰμί. John’s account, like Matthew’s, uses ὁ ἐρχόμενος, but like Mark, John does not include the story of John’s disciples coming to Jesus.

51. This passage is not found in Mark, but it is included in Luke (7:22), which may suggest that it comes from Q (see Gaye Strathearn, “Matthew as an Editor of the Life and Teachings of Jesus Christ,” in How the New Testament Came to Be, ed. Kent P. Jackson and Frank F. Judd Jr. [Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University and Deseret Book, 2006], 144–46).

52. One possible exception is a messianic fragment from the Dead Sea Scrolls (4Q521) that describes God, through His Messiah, giving sight to the blind, raising the dead, and preaching to the poor.

53. We do not know how the early Christians identified the Sermon on the Mount, but the modern title was not used until the fourth century AD when Augustine coined it (Reply to Faustus the Manichaeans 5.3). In antiquity, people often identified a text by a word or phrase from the opening line. For example, Akkadian documents refer to the Babylonian creation story as the Enuma Elish (“when on high”), and the Hebrew titles for the books of the Torah all come from the opening words of the text.

54. “The blind receive their sight” = Matthew 9:27–31; “the lame walk” = Matthew 9:1–8; the lepers are cleansed” = Matthew 8:2–4; “the dead are raised up” = Matthew 9:18–19, 23–26. The only difficulty is finding an example of the deaf hearing, but this is a difficulty found only in the English text, not the Greek. The Greek word for deaf in Matthew 11:5 is the plural of κοπῆς, the same word
used to describe the demoniac who is dumb (κόφος; Matthew 9:32–33).

59. The words “they delivered them unto us, which from the beginning were eyewitnesses” should be more properly translated as “they who were eyewitnesses from the beginning delivered them unto us.” See the discussion of these verses in Judd, “Who Really Wrote the Gospels?” 125–27.
61. These first-person accounts may also possibly provide evidence that Luke was using as a source the travel diary of someone else who accompanied Paul. Luke explicitly tells his audience that he used previously written sources from eyewitnesses to compose his Gospel (see Luke 1:1–3). Unfortunately, we do not have enough evidence to determine with certainty which of these options is correct. On this, see Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 322–27.
64. Although Matthew and Mark use the phrase “son of God” to describe Jesus, Luke is the only synoptic Gospel to also use the significant title “Savior” (Luke 1:24,69; 2:11; Acts 3:13–14).
67. Some early manuscripts, such as Sinaiticus (c. fourth century AD) and Alexandrinus (c. fifth century AD), have “seventy,” whereas others, such as p75 (c. 3rd century AD) and Vaticanus (fourth century AD), have “seventy-two” (see Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 2nd ed. [Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1994], 126–27).
68. The King James Version reads, “They found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions” (Luke 2:46). The Joseph Smith Translation modifies the last part of that verse: “And they were hearing him, and asking him questions” (Wayment, *The Complete Joseph Smith Translation of the New Testament*, 152).
69. See also Luke 17:11: “And it came to pass, as he went to Jerusalem, that he passed through the midst of Samaria and Galilee.”
71. Not until the second half of the second century do we find this Gospel quoted by the church fathers. Prior to this time, however, various Gnostic groups used it. This may be one reason why the church fathers were slow to accept it. One Gnostic, Heracleon, was the first person to write a commentary on the Gospel of

72. John J. Rousseau and Rami Arav, *Jesus and His World: An Archaeological and Cultural Dictionary* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 155–57. James H. Charlesworth notes the significance of this find: “No other ancient writer—no author or editor of the Old Testament, the Pseudepigrapha, not even Josephus—mentions such a significant pool in Jerusalem. Moreover, no known ancient building was a pentagon, which was apparently what John was describing with the five porticoes” (“Reinterpreting John: How the Dead Sea Scrolls Have Revolutionized Our Understanding of the Gospel of John,” *Bible Review* 9 [1993]: 20).


76. Nowhere else in John’s Gospel do we find Jesus described as the word, although we do find reference to it in 1 John 1:1–2. Robert J. Matthews suggests that, in addition to John 1, John 3:27–36 may also originate with John the Baptist (*A Burning Light: The Life and Ministry of John the Baptist* [Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 1972], 79–83).

77. Both Clement of Alexandria (quoted in Eusebius, *Church History*, 6.14.7) and the Muratorian Canon (9–16) indicate that John worked with others in deciding to write his Gospel. For a discussion, see Judd, “Who Really Wrote the Gospels?” 132–34. The story of the adulterous woman in John 8:1–11 is not original to the text. It is not found in the oldest texts of the Gospel and clearly interrupts the flow of the narrative. For a Latter-day Saint analysis of the text, see


79. John’s emphasis that the “word was made flesh” was in response to a group of Christians known as Docetists. Their philosophical world view insisted that a perfect god could not have an imperfect body of flesh. Their philosophical world view insisted that a perfect god could not have an imperfect body of flesh. Their name comes from the Greek word, *dokeo*, which means “to seem” or “to appear.” They taught that Christ only “seemed” to come to earth in a fleshly tabernacle—hence John’s insistence that the Word became flesh. This may also be the reason that he included the doubting Thomas pericope in John 20:24–29.

Teachers of the restored gospel can find valuable resources to enhance their study.

Courtesy of Richard Crookston
Scholarly Books on the New Testament

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As a scholar of the New Testament, I am often asked which books on the New Testament are the best ones to study. The question sometimes baffles me because to answer such a question, I must first narrow the selection to a specific area of interest, understand the audience who will be reading the book, and know the purpose for which the book is being read. Reading for enjoyment, for example, is not always the same as reading to understand a subject. Moreover, when a person asks about the best books, does the adjective best imply the most important, the most influential, the most enjoyable, or the best of some other category?

Another important facet of this discussion is a general feeling of skepticism that pervades our impressions of modern biblical scholarship and scholars. The modern academy operates under the assumption that belief and faith have no place in academia. Rather, the scholarly ideal is the detached historian who is uninfluenced (although this can never fully be achieved) in his or her conclusions and can present findings without appeal to emotion—outside the framework of an established religious tradition. This approach has attracted a backlash from believers who seek to defend their beliefs against what they feel are encroachments from secularism and atheism.

Interestingly, the two approaches—sometimes popularly referred to as faith-based versus academic—which seem to be at odds with one another, are actually fairly compatible. In both, the quest should ideally be for truth and an accurate understanding of who Jesus really was, what He taught His disciples, and the meaning of His death.
Scholars who seek for accurate answers to these questions must remain open to all hypotheses regardless of the scholars’ religious attitudes. With their biases put aside, scholars must painstakingly explore all possible answers, whether popular or not. If they allow their religious beliefs to influence their findings, their findings become tainted and unusable by the larger scholarly and believing communities. This is not an argument for the postmodern scholarly ideal of absolute unbiased historicism; rather, it describes the direction and intent of the academic mindset, even though the academy invites those who believe and those who do not.

Some may feel that this approach encourages atheism or secularism, but consider for a moment the outcome if all scholars labored under a single religious tradition, whether it be Catholicism, Methodism, Anglicanism, or another religious tradition. The result would be a self-perpetuating system that dominates discussions of religion and could not tolerate diversity of opinion, such as our own unique understanding of history and faith. If our own tradition guided the scholarly enterprise, then perhaps we would feel more at ease; but again, this domination would ultimately limit the discussion for the millions who do not believe as we do. If the discussion is to be applicable to the widest possible audience, it must remain detached, unbiased, and guided by the quest for truth.

On the other hand, inspired prophetic direction, revelation, and counsel guide the scholarly enterprise that exists in our own faith. My own experience has taught me that I can refer to a vast body of scholarly research, remaining open to consider all possible answers, and evaluate it in light of the Restoration. This process should not be considered a buffet-style approach but rather a feast in which prophetic direction and inspiration have called our attention to specific eternal truths.

A pitfall of this approach may be that it could be interpreted as a distillation of scholarly materials into Latter-day Saint discussions and contexts. This, however, would be putting the cart before the horse. Scholarship functions on the rigid application of methodology and consensus opinion, neither of which can guarantee truth absolutely. Therefore, the scholar who relies on the distillation of current scholarship also builds upon a shifting foundation that will require each subsequent generation to reconsider the position of the academy and then redefine his or her current position. On the other hand, reliance on the inspired words of living prophets and apostles reveals a sure foundation and permits us to recognize the discovery of truth in any discipline or science.
In other words, each new generation of scholars recognizes an orthodox set of scholars from whose work the new generation can freely draw; and then when those scholarly works intersect with their own findings, the scholarly studies are cited in notes. Unfortunately, this approach will never achieve final results because as each new generation of scholars redefines the past, our own scholarship will shift and then shift again. Rather, the ideal would be to handle the original sources used by those scholars and then cite how those modern scholars use their sources. We can then question, establish, or alter their findings based on original sources and not enter into the scholarly debates inaccurately armed.

Interestingly, although the light of the Restoration has clarified many eternal truths, other areas of interest have been mentioned only in passing. When no prophetic counsel has been offered on a certain subject, Latter-day Saint scholars are left to navigate the field for themselves. If the tools of scholarship have never been fully cultivated, this endeavor will lead to less-than-desirable results.

With the light of the Restoration to guide us, we are in a position to draw upon the available primary, or original, sources and then the best available scholarship and use it in meaningful ways. In this spirit, I present what I feel are some of the most influential works on the New Testament today—publications that continue to have the greatest impact in our scholarly lives for the near future. These works have shaped the way we ask questions of the New Testament. Only by working with the same primary sources will we be able to enter into the arena of their discussions as well as acquire any valuable and enduring information from those discussions.

The Quest for the “Historical Jesus”

In the twentieth century, following the English translation of Albert Schweitzer’s *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, a group of scholars began thinking about Jesus and His life in exciting new ways. They recognized that public understanding of Jesus had been filtered through the larger institution of the church and that to really appreciate who Jesus was, they would have to peel away the layers of tradition to discover the “historical Jesus.” The church was initially loosely defined as any institution that altered or shaped the way the story of Jesus was presented, whether it be a first-century or a nineteenth-century institution. When these successive layers of tradition were peeled back, a more perfect picture of Jesus would thus emerge, defined by a more precise understanding of what He said, did, and experienced. The first so-called quest for the historical
Jesus concluded that He was an apocalyptic prophet who promised the dawning of a new millennial age.

The first quest was followed by a second quest, which of course has been followed by other tangential quests. Recognizing certain deficiencies in the first quest, such as a limited interpretation of history, inspired the efforts of the second-generation scholars. They felt that Jesus could not be understood or defined simply as the sum of His experiences and sayings (that is, by His historical setting alone); rather, He should be understood dynamically as a composite of His experiences and sayings and by how His peers—the church and early institutional leaders—defined Him. Interestingly, the new quest has been bogged down for some time as scholars have attempted to clarify the progression of leadership from Jesus’s death, to the Apostles, and to the late first-century bishops and elders. The new quest also attempts to develop a clearer understanding of the relationship of first-century sources to the life of Jesus.

A number of vitally important works have emerged from this quest. No single work has yet emerged as the defining monograph, but the majority of books about Jesus trace their ancestry to this quest in some way; in other words, modern studies of Jesus’s life are part of the dialogue of this quest. Being uninformed about how the quest has shaped the modern discussion can, in fact, lead us to interpret findings and then draw certain conclusions without seeing the implications of the larger picture. In essence, it is somewhat like our purchasing a new house because we like the front door.

My own experience has led me to esteem the following books as the best books on the quest. Albert Schweitzer’s *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* is still essential reading in the field as well as James M. Robinson’s *A New Quest of the Historical Jesus*. Still timely, but not as careful or comprehensive as Schweitzer or Robinson, is Bart D. Ehrman’s *Jesus: Apocalyptic Prophet of a New Millennium*. Ehrman’s work signals a call to return to the findings of Schweitzer and, in essence, is an attempt to reign in the more tangential quests. His work, however, demonstrates that scholars still consider Jesus an apocalyptic prophet who prophesied of a new age and asserts that titles such as *Savior* and *Redeemer* were later descriptions applied to Jesus by His second- and third-generation followers.

*Kyrios Christos* or Lord Jesus

Perhaps more properly considered a subset of the quest for the “historical Jesus” is one of the most important and long-lasting works
ever written in the field: Wilhelm Bousset’s *Kyrios Christos: A History of the Belief in Christ from the Beginnings of Christianity to Irenaeus* traced the development of changing perceptions about Jesus, which the first quest had posited would exist, through the first Christian century. This enormously successful monograph has defined the way many scholars present the life of Jesus and brought incredible scholarly acumen and breadth to New Testament studies.

In 1992, a group of scholars met at Princeton under the direction of the influential James H. Charlesworth to work out some of the categories emanating from Bousset’s work. Although not instigated directly as a response to Bousset, the seminar participants felt that the recent publications of a wealth of primary materials—the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Nag Hammadi Codices, the Cologne Mani Codex, and other works—warranted a reinvestigation. The resulting publication of their discussions, *The Messiah: Developments in Earliest Judaism and Christianity*, continues to be a must-read for students of the New Testament and early Christianity.

Even more recently, Larry Hurtado’s *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* has challenged the towering presence of Bousset in the field, presenting one of the most careful and thoughtful scholarly monographs to date. Hurtado’s work, which rightly challenges the fundamentals and categories of the quest for the “historical Jesus,” attempts to reconfigure the way we think about the transition between the living Jesus and the way early Christians interpreted His life. These studies could prove vitally important for the dynamics of late first-century Christianity and the developing ecclesiastical structure that arose out of this period.

These issues may at first appear tangential to our typical areas of interest. However, simple questions, such as whether the Apostasy was a result of internal corruption or external persecution, have not been answered by Latter-day Saint scholars. Moreover, we have not answered the fundamental question of whether the textual corruption induced the Apostasy or whether apostates altered canonical texts, which resulted in a corruption of practice and belief—implying that a few wayward Christians were able to bring down the whole.

**New Testament Textual Criticism**

The growing discipline of New Testament textual criticism, once a subset of New Testament studies but now a burgeoning field in itself, has developed under careful scholarly scrutiny and is now on the verge of making some major breakthroughs, the equivalent of which has
not been seen for nearly a hundred years. The pioneers of the field, Karl Lachmann, Constantin von Tischendorf, Brooke Foss Westcott, Fenton John Anthony Hort, Eberhard Nestle, Irwin Nestle, Hermann Freiherr von Soden, and others, developed methodological approaches and categories that are still in place today.

More recently, however, a trend has developed that has caused scholars to rethink some of the older approaches in the field and reconfigure the way we discuss the text of the New Testament and how we reconstruct its text. Primary among the new approaches are two books that advocate more eclectic or reasoned approaches to recovering the original text of the New Testament as well as maintaining certain methodologies advanced by earlier New Testament textual critics. Kurt and Barbara Aland’s *The Text of the New Testament* is foremost in this regard, with a particular emphasis on rewriting the categories of New Testament textual families. The fourth edition of Metzger’s influential *Text of the New Testament*, revised and expanded by Bart D. Ehrman, is also exemplary.

The impact of textual criticism is only now beginning to be felt in scholarship today as the texts and manuscripts of the New Testament begin to reveal how Christianity grew out of and borrowed from Judaism. Those same texts also reveal a reverence for Jesus at an incredibly early stage in the history of the church. These findings are, in fact, contradictory to the standard assumptions in the academy today. In more plain terminology, if early Christians did reverence Jesus as Lord and God by at least AD 100 (and we might assume earlier, but textual artifacts do not exist earlier than that), we can reasonably assume that the second-century church did not develop the belief that Jesus was God and Lord of Salvation. These ideas were already present in the period prior to the end of the first century! Perhaps these results are not startling to some scholars because these ideas are already found in the New Testament (a text that has been severely discounted as a historical source in the modern era), but they do show that the academy is generally heading in a favorable direction today.

**Paul: The Author of Christianity?**

Perhaps no other figure in the New Testament besides Jesus has garnered such attention and created such diversity of opinion as Paul the Apostle. In my opinion, the area of Pauline studies is the most difficult to navigate today, so the following ideas can only sweepingly describe the present state of the field and what books might be best.

In pre-World War II Germany, with the rise of the Religionsgeschichteschule (History of Religions School), which sought to describe
Christianity as a social phenomenon of the Greco-Roman world, Paul came to be seen as a product of Jewish apocalyptic anxiety and Christian liberalism. In other words, Jewish expectations of the coming of the Messiah and the associated frustration that the coming of the Messiah appeared to be delayed caused many Jews to feel disappointment and lack of confidence in God. Those same Jews, like Paul, purportedly began to look for other expressions of God’s grace. According to the theory, Christianity opened new possibilities for these frustrated Jews.

With Paul at the helm of this reenvisioning of Judaism, which also came to be called Christianity, the early Christian church developed according to Paul’s personal outlook and perspective. Early interactions among church leaders, therefore, began to be interpreted as competing forms of Christianity, seeking to imply their own forms of orthodoxy on the others. Of course, this less-than-flattering view of early Christianity places great emphasis on Paul’s role in shaping the church. In these studies, the typical findings are that Paul is the most important figure in Christianity besides Jesus or that Paul, rather than Jesus, is responsible for making Christianity what it is today.

Hundreds, if not thousands, of books have been written on the life of Paul. But before anyone reads one of them, he or she would be wise to connect the particular study into the family tree of Pauline scholarship. Certain important questions should be asked. Is the book in question a reaction to the Religionsgeschichteschule, or does it advance their ideas? Further questions should follow—does Paul appear as a Jew trying to change Christianity, or is he a Christian trying to make sense of his Jewish heritage?

Some excellent works on Paul’s life are Alan F. Segal’s *Paul the Convert: The Apostolate and Apostasy of Saul the Pharisee*, and Jerome Murphy-O’Connor’s *Paul: A Critical Life*. These two works are both carefully researched and provide the reader with cautiously constructed views of how Paul fits into the overall picture of developing Christianity. Segal sees Paul as a radical convert to Christianity whose divergent beliefs encouraged his conversion from Judaism to Christianity, whereas Murphy-O’Connor sees Paul as a humble convert of dynamic personality and boundless energy.

Another invaluable study of Paul can be found in Wayne A. Meeks’s *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul*. This work provides the reader with the necessary Greco-Roman background for understanding Paul’s life after conversion. Its major shortfall is that it omits Paul’s early period prior to his conversion. For that time period, *Paul’s Early Period* by Rainer Riesner is essential reading.
Dictionaries

New Testament dictionaries are abundant today and approach the New Testament from a variety of different vantage points. Unfortunately, no single dictionary satisfies every need of the New Testament scholar. Although it unfortunately comes in a six-volume set, the *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, edited by David Noel Freedman, is perhaps the most comprehensive dictionary of the Bible today. Some of its entries are now outdated, and some important subjects receive only minor treatment when readers might expect otherwise. It is, however, an excellent starting point for biblical study. The *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible* is also a handy reference companion. Its brevity notwithstanding, the entries are very up to date and reflect the most recent scholarship in the field today.

For the more serious student of the New Testament, Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Freidric’s *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, translated by Geoffrey W. Bromily, is a standard in the field. Unfortunately, it is probably used to the exclusion of the equally important three-volume work by Celsas Spicq, *Theological Lexicon of the New Testament*, edited by James D. Ernest. These two works combined are an essential part of any New Testament library, particularly when readers are studying the meaning of New Testament terms in Greek and the implications of certain words in their larger Greco-Roman context.

New Testament History: Greco-Roman or Jewish

In the academy today, two schools of thought prevail regarding the sociological background and historical development of Christianity in the first few centuries. Certainly this is a simplification to some degree, but the vast majority of studies in this area can be classified in one of two ways—either Christianity was a social phenomenon growing out of the larger Greco-Roman world or it was a small Jewish reformist movement that eventually broke from its Jewish moorings.

The essential question facing students of the New Testament is whether studying Classics or studying Judaism will be more helpful to understanding the New Testament world; in other words, is Latin or Hebrew more beneficial for New Testament study? The question is not easily resolved, and Latter-day Saint scholars have typically adopted both approaches. The obvious answer seems to be that both approaches have their merits; unfortunately, very few schools today approach the question from both viewpoints. It is essentially an either-or proposal.
For the student of the New Testament, the following works are still important and largely influential. Emil Schürer’s *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ* (175 B.C.–A.D. 135), revised and edited by Geza Vermes and Fergus Millar, explores the theory that Christianity grew largely from Jewish origins. Although only available in German, Hermann Strack and Paul Billerbeck’s six-volume *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch* is the best source to reference primary sources on the intersections between Judaism and Christianity. Joachim Jeremias’s *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus: An Investigation into Economic and Social Condition during the New Testament Period* is also helpful and still contains insights that are pertinent today, even though the work is now dated.

On the Greco-Roman world, the revised edition of *The New Testament Background*, edited by Charles Kingsley Barrett, is careful and cautious in providing source materials for understanding the world of the New Testament. F. F. Bruce’s *New Testament History*, although dated, is still a favorite among Latter-day Saint scholars. Bruce’s work is not generally highly regarded among scholars today because its presentation is no longer on the cutting edge, but it is still a competent introduction to the subject. I personally like Luke Timothy Johnson’s *The Writings of the New Testament*, although at times his religious views lead him to dismiss scholarly discussions unnecessarily.

**Commentaries**

The value of New Testament commentaries is that they provide a reference point for interpretation of selected passages. Today, various commentaries are aimed at teachers, preachers, academics, and lay students. Therefore, no single commentary can satisfy every need or answer every question. One important reason for readers to purchase New Testament commentaries is obvious because they typically provide the most up-to-date bibliographic information for a given book of scripture; moreover, they also often represent a summary of the various scholarly approaches to a specific book, which can help the reader understand simple facts such as why scholars often quote references to the Gospel of Mark first even when the same story is also found in Matthew and Luke.

One commentary series stands out as exemplary for beginning students of the New Testament: Black’s New Testament Commentaries. For the really serious student of the New Testament, the conservative Anchor Bible Commentary series, the liberal Hermeneia series, and the New International Greek Testament Commentaries are helpful and informative resources.
Development of the Canon

Although the history of the New Testament canon is a specialized subset of New Testament studies, it is an essential part of understanding how to use and interpret the text of the New Testament. Often, I am asked what the “original Greek” says in this or that passage. This question, however, cannot be answered today because we do not have the original and because we do not know for certain the relationship of the earliest surviving written texts (all of them in Greek) and their earlier Aramaic sources (the language of Jesus and the language of the first written and oral sources).

Another important reason for our studying the history of the New Testament canon is to avoid the reliance upon emotive arguments intended to demonstrate the superiority of one translation over another. Certainly some translations are better than others, but no single translation in English today is superior to the words of Jesus as He spoke them. Every translation, including the Greek, Latin, Syriac, English, Spanish, or any other language, can only approximate what Jesus said and what He meant. These translations will always remain secondary sources that report to the best of their ability what Jesus said. As far as we can tell today, we have only a very few words in the New Testament that actually represent the words as Jesus spoke them while everything else is preserved in translation. Those words are “Amen,” “talitha cumi,” “abba,” “mammon,” “Cephas,” “eloi eloi lama sabachthani,” and “raca.” Because the translations of His words are the only way we can access His words, it is important to understand the history of those translations. Bruce M. Metzger’s *The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development, and Significance* is still the standard in the field and is very accessible for the beginning student.30

Conclusion

No single list of books on the New Testament can feasibly represent all the best books available today. Differences of opinion will always arise about which ones are best. Even Latter-day Saint scholars may have significant differences of opinion. On the other hand, a fairly wide consensus exists on which books should be considered best in the sense that they have been the most influential and should be required reading for anyone who wishes to pursue further study of the New Testament and early Christianity.

It would be strange indeed to walk into a car dealership today and purchase a car based on the bumper alone. The bumper is only
one small piece of equipment on a very complex machine that costs many thousands of dollars. Our study of the New Testament should be no different. If we purchase the bumper, we also purchase the car, and yet we often like the results of certain scholarly theories without realizing the larger implications for those studies. For example, one of the areas of intense scholarly interest today is the development of Christianity from a small community to a fractured institution in the second and third centuries or from a series of distinct communities that eventually developed into a single community under pressure from the orthodox movement. The issue has far-reaching ramifications for our understanding of Christianity and of Jesus. Latter-day Saint scholars ask whether the early church began as a unified body that eventually fell into disarray or whether only a small group of early Christians represented Jesus’s true followers while all the others were apostate. It is an important question for our understanding of Gnosticism, the text of the Bible, the early Christian Fathers, and other areas of interest.

If, for example, Gnosticism represented the true, or most correct, form of Christianity, the New Testament itself was composed by apostate Christians. If, on the other hand, the church was already in apostasy in the mid-first century after the death of the Apostles and if the original unity of the church was already beginning to disintegrate, the church fathers cannot tell us anything about the Apostasy because they had always lived in an apostasy. Rather, their apostasy is the suppression of other forms of Christianity who were using their own apostate viewpoints to suppress others.

These and other questions are vital to our progress in the field of early Christian studies, but without our pausing to answer some of the more fundamental questions in the field, our own progress will soon falter. Our prophetic moorings will always provide balance to our study, but if we are to contribute to the larger discussion, our methodology and approach will need careful consideration. The books I’ve mentioned and many others like them can provide a starting point for these future discussions.

Notes


9. The series *Textus Criticus Maior* promises to be the most comprehensive collection of textual variants of the New Testament ever assembled.


13. My own study of Paul’s life seeks to place him within the context of the larger ecclesiastical or church structure and to show how his personality developed according to the Spirit of God rather than how his personality shaped Christianity: see Thomas A. Wayment, *From Persecutor to Apostle: A Biography of Paul* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2006).


21. It is important to note that this does not imply that the Greco-Roman worldview approach is preferable but rather that the language of translation (Greek) is significantly informed by Greco-Roman usage of those same terms.


Faithful Latter-day Saint scholars let the biblical text speak for itself, looking through the lens of restored truth.

Courtesy of Brandon Barney of Stephen Hales Creative, Inc.
Searching for God’s Word in New Testament Textual Criticism

Brian M. Hauglid

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Some Latter-day Saints may fear that biblical criticism means calling into question significant saving doctrines or even the divinity of Jesus Christ. Perhaps some biblical scholars tend to approach the discipline of biblical textual criticism in this way. However, one caution in the field is to recognize and beware of our own set of presuppositions and biases. Ideally, the idea is to try to let the text speak for itself, to avoid proof-texting, and to look at the text through the lens of the Restoration. Those who try to be responsible in their exegesis and to be guided by the text understand that criticism in relation to the scriptures does not mean that the Bible is to be criticized. On the contrary, responsible critics seek to find the original inspired word of God in the biblical manuscripts. In fact, textual criticism involves making a judgment as to which manuscripts or parts of manuscripts are closest to the original.

Concerning New Testament textual criticism in particular, no original manuscripts (that is, autographs) of the New Testament dating to the time of the authors exist. However, nearly fifty-five hundred later manuscripts—purportedly copies of copies—have been preserved. All of these manuscripts date from as early as the second and third centuries AD to 1600. The task of the New Testament critic is to try to determine whether the readings in these manuscripts are original to the biblical author, later insertions, or errors.

After surveying the writing surfaces and styles of New Testament manuscripts available to scholars (papyrus [uncials and majuscules], parchment, and minuscules), I will explore and discuss some of the
major variants among these manuscripts. Finally, I will show how New Testament scholars study these variants using textual criticism to determine which may be the original reading and which are later scribal errors—accidental or intentional.

A Survey of Existing New Testament Manuscripts (Witnesses)

The majority of the nearly fifty-five hundred extant New Testament manuscripts date from after the eighth century, meaning that at least seven centuries had elapsed from the time of the original writing before the bulk of the surviving manuscripts were copied. A majority of these manuscripts were produced in the medieval period after the eleventh century. However, we should not automatically conclude that later manuscripts are not as reliable as earlier manuscripts. Scholars have found instances in which earlier manuscripts contain errors but later ones contain original readings.

New Testament textual critics divide surviving manuscripts into two main groups: lectionaries and continuous-text manuscripts. Lectionaries are manuscripts of specific reading blocks for daily worship services that correspond to the needs of the church calendar. They do not contain the whole New Testament but are essentially focused on a part of it. They were used in monastic life, public worship, and private study. Lectionaries date to as early as the fourth century. Continuous-text manuscripts are written on two types of material, papyrus and parchment. On these manuscripts, the two types of writing are majuscule (capitals) and minuscule (lower case). These manuscripts also survive in two formats: scroll (rolled) or codex (leaves, book).

Important Papyrus Manuscripts

Papyrus manuscripts are significant because they represent the earliest New Testament texts. They also preserve the text before it circulated in codex form, and universally they are more fluid, meaning they contain more variant readings in their text. In other words, the earlier the manuscript, the more variants it contains and the more fluidity one can find in the text. Papyrus manuscripts are identified with the letter $p$ and a superscript number indicating its place in the corpus of papyri. So far, approximately 116 papyrus fragments have been catalogued. What follows are some of the most important papyri:

The fragment $p^4$ (portions of Luke 1–6), $p^{64}$ (portions of Matthew 26), and $p^{67}$ (portions of Matthew 3, 5) together “represent the oldest four-Gospel manuscript known to exist.” These papyri derive
from a single codex dating to the second century and likely originally contained all four of the Gospels, which attests to an earlier, more complete collection and order of the four Gospels.\(^6\)

In the Chester Beatty collection, fragments of all four Gospels and Acts are found in \(p^{85}\) and date to the first half of the third century, whereas the number and order of many of Paul’s epistles are attested in \(p^{46}\), which dates to about AD 200.\(^7\)

Housed in the John Rylands Library in Manchester, \(p^{52}\) (John 18:31–33; 37–38) is considered to be the oldest and smallest surviving fragment, dating to about 125.

In the mid-1950s, Martin Bodmer discovered more New Testament papyrus fragments. One of the most significant is \(p^{66}\) with John 1:1–6:11 and portions of 14–21, which contains about 440 variations. For instance, in 13:5, where Jesus washes the feet of the disciples, He uses a “foot-basin” instead of a “basin.”\(^8\) Other important Bodmer papyri include \(p^{72}\), the earliest known copy of Jude and the two epistles of Peter (third century), and \(p^{75}\), the earliest and largest known fragment of the Gospel of Luke and the Gospel of John, which is dated somewhere between AD 175 and 225. Interestingly, two of these fragments, \(p^{66}\) and \(p^{75}\), do not have the story of the adulterous woman in John 7:53–8:11.

Finally, some of the most recent discoveries come from the cache of papyri discovered at Oxyrhynchus, Egypt. For instance, \(p^{115}\) (late third to early fourth century) contains a fragmentary text of the book of Revelation. It is interesting that in 13:18, this manuscript, as well as a few others, uses 616 as the number of the beast as opposed to the usual 666. Some scholars argue that \(p^{115}\) is the correct reading.\(^9\) It is certain that with the large number of papyri found in Oxyrhynchus or other places, scholars will continue to make new discoveries.

**Important Majuscule Manuscripts**

Majuscule manuscripts signal the rise of the fixed text after Constantine (early fourth century) and also the rise of the codex form. Similar to most papyri, the text is written in all capitals. *Uncial* is the Greek term for capitals, and *majuscule* is the Latin term for capitals. Majuscules are significant because they represent the beginning stages of the definitive codification of the New Testament text. In addition, they give rise to the text families and the post-Constantinian commission to copy fifty Bibles for the churches.\(^10\) Though many majuscules exist, only a few of the most significant ones will be briefly mentioned. The following appear regularly in the critical apparatus of the Greek New Testament.\(^11\)
or 01. In the 1850s, Constantin von Tischendorf visited the St. Catherine Monastery near Mount Sinai and discovered one of the most important majuscule manuscripts, known as the “Codex Sinaiticus,” which is identified by the Hebrew alphabet’s first letter (Aleph). This manuscript represents the oldest complete Greek New Testament and dates to the fourth century. It also contains much of the Old Testament and the epistle of Barnabas and the Shepherd of Hermas. It is one of the only manuscripts written in four columns.

A or 02 represents the fifth-century Codex Alexandrinus, which contains most of the New Testament and the Old Testament and 1–2 Clement. It was discovered in Alexandria, Egypt.

B or 03 represents the Codex Vaticanus, which is kept in the Vatican. It is a fourth-century manuscript containing most of the New Testament and the Old Testament.

D or 04 represents the fourth- or fifth-century Codex Bezae. It is a bilingual manuscript with Greek and Latin on facing pages. It contains the Gospels, much of Acts, and a part of 3 John. Some scholars contend that D 04 is a derivative of a second-century original text “and therefore one whose readings must be considered carefully if one is hoping to get back to the earliest and possibly original form of the NT itself.” Other textual scholars argue that this text is questionable and are hesitant to openly endorse it.

Important Minuscule Manuscripts

Minuscule manuscripts are written in lowercase (cursive) Greek in columns, usually with no divisions between words. Minuscules have not been an important source for textual studies. In fact, only some of them have been transcribed for scholarly use, but they are rarely considered in text-critical studies. The following are a few exceptions.

Families 1 and 13. Family 1 (1, 118, and so on) and Family 13 (13, 69, and so on) include two different groupings of manuscripts. These are medieval manuscripts from the eleventh to the fifteenth centuries. One interesting feature of the manuscripts from Family 13 is that the episode about the adulterous woman is not found in John 7:53–8:11 but is found after Luke 21:38. Family 13 is considered to be one of the most important collections of manuscripts, as it is cited often in the critical apparatus agreeing with many older manuscripts.

Manuscript 33. MS 33, dating from the ninth century, is commonly referred to as the “queen of the cursives” and contains the entire New Testament except the book of Revelation.
Manuscript 61. MS 61, which dates to the early sixteenth century, is of interest in that it is the only Greek manuscript that contains what is commonly called the “Three Heavenly Witnesses” or the “Johanine Comma,” found in 1 John 5:7–8. Further discussion will show that this passage is certainly spurious but was included by Erasmus in his Greek New Testament (textus receptus) and therefore made its way into the King James Version.

Other Ancient Versions of the New Testament

Beyond the New Testament papyri, majuscules, and minuscules, many New Testament manuscripts are available in such languages as Syriac, Latin, Coptic, Armenian, and Arabic. These manuscripts derive from the Christian tradition and date between the fourth and nineteenth centuries with Syriac, Latin, and Coptic as the earlier versions and Armenian and Arabic as the later. A few important examples of these texts include the following:

The Peshitta version or Syriac Vulgate. This fourth-century New Testament version contains all the books of the New Testament except 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, Jude, and Revelation.15

The Latin Versions. Many Latin manuscripts have survived, spanning from the fourth to the thirteenth century. Among the most famous are the Vulgate versions of the Bible, which Jerome initially produced towards the end of the fourth century. Unfortunately, the more than eight thousand Vulgate manuscripts since Jerome’s day exhibit a high degree of corruption.16

Coptic. Coptic is a late derivation from the ancient Egyptian language, and New Testament manuscripts from as early as the third century have survived in Coptic dialects such as Sahidic and Boharic.

Armenian. Because of the beauty and accuracy of its translation, the Armenian version is often referred to as the “queen of the versions.” This text dates from some time prior to the eighth century.

Arabic. Christian Arabic translations of the Gospels date to the eighth century; and other parts of the Bible have been translated into Arabic as well. Some manuscripts were translated into Arabic from Greek, Syriac, and Coptic (Sahidic and Boharic).17

Patristic Commentary on the New Testament

Many manuscripts have survived that contain scriptural quotes and commentary from early Christians such as Clement of Alexandria (died ca. 212), Tertullian (died after 220), Gregory of Nyssa (died 394),
Augustine (died 430), and Ephraem the Syrian (died 444), helping readers to have a window into how the manuscripts of the New Testament in early Christianity were read and understood.

One of the most famous and controversial of these patristic manuscripts is Tatian’s (flourished ca. 170) Diatessaron, or harmony of the four Gospels. His harmony became very famous during the fourth and fifth centuries, but because Tatian was thought to be a heretic, copies of the Diatessaron were destroyed, and only fragments remain. Scholars are certain that Tatian’s text influenced later manuscripts and even the modern Bible. But the type and extent of this influence are still under debate.18

Groupings of New Testament Manuscripts: Text Families or Text Types

New Testament manuscripts are also divided into broad groups distinguished by certain textual characteristics. In general, scholars have discerned four groupings of manuscripts, called families or types:

*Alexandrian.* Aleph 01 and B 03 have a similar text type that seems to be associated with Alexandria, Egypt. Thus, these manuscripts are sometimes referred to as Alexandrian. Scholars have found that this text type is generally shorter than the other families and has not gone through as much polishing or systematic grammatical changes. Many scholars view the Alexandrian text type as the best of the families and most closely reflecting the original.19

*Western.* Other manuscripts, such as D 01 and Old Latin, share characteristics and fall into the Western text type. This text type is the longest and is marked with paraphrase, or a restatement of the text, which has given rise to secondary additions, omissions, and other types of changes.20

*Byzantine.* Most of the later manuscripts belong to the Byzantine text types. When the Byzantine text type is the only support for a given reading, it is usually considered secondary.21

*Caesarean.* Another text type is the Caesarean, which mixes both the Alexandrian and the Western text types. This mixing makes this the least homogeneous text type and therefore much less distinctive than the others.22

Most textual critics have used these groupings to aid in judging variants in the manuscripts. Using this approach in New Testament textual criticism, “one will find in the literature a general disapproval of the Byzantine type, a general suspicion of the distinctiveness of the Western type and a general approval of readings that belong to the
Alexandrian text-type.” However, in recent years, New Testament scholars have increasingly taken a more eclectic approach and do not follow these text groupings as rigidly as their predecessors.

Problems Encountered in Studying Variants in New Testament Manuscripts

Every manuscript should be treated individually, as each has its own story. Sometimes very early manuscripts contain copying errors, but later ones may have readings closer to the original. Because no autograph of a New Testament book exists, we should clearly understand that the date of a manuscript will differ from the date of the text.

All the roughly fifty-five hundred New Testament manuscripts date from periods of time after the original text was created and are therefore copies of copies. This means that over the many centuries since the authors first penned the originals, scribes had been hard at work producing copies of copies of copies. However, as well trained and capable as many of these scribes may have been, they were human and sometimes introduced errors into the text—errors that could be passed on for centuries. Most times these changes were unintentional; however, some were intentional. The task of the textual critic is to try to determine as best as possible what parts of texts are original readings and how each variant, or copying error, occurred.

Textual critics use rules and methods to identify errors and navigate through the variants. For instance, textual critics will generally analyze external and internal evidence. If a textual critic is looking at the manuscripts externally, the provenance of the manuscript will be considered, and the number (not the best criterion) and quality of the manuscripts or witnesses will be examined. When analyzing the internal evidence, the textual critic will study such issues as the vocabulary and style of the variant verses. We should remember that the rule of thumb in New Testament textual criticism is to try to determine the original reading that may have given rise to the variants. In general, the original reading is also a more difficult reading than the variant because the original has not gone through as much polishing. The following is a discussion of the common types of errors that were introduced into a text. Examples from specific passages will illustrate some of the challenges textual critics face in determining original readings amidst the variant readings.

Additions or omissions. A large portion of the discussion concerning the manuscripts concerns whether a longer or shorter reading should be preferred. Often the shorter reading is to be preferred because copyists
were more inclined to add text than omit it. For example, according to some scholars, Matthew 9:34, “But the Pharisees said, He casteth out devils through the prince of the devils,” was likely intentionally added to harmonize with the similar text in Matthew 12:24 or Luke 11:15. On the other hand, scribes often accidentally, or unintentionally, omitted text when a manuscript was visually copied. Also, in theological texts, it was quite common to omit words or phrases that did not seem to correspond to the understanding of the doctrine or principle at the time. When scribes or others tried to harmonize two manuscripts, they would either shorten or lengthen parallels to make them conform to each other. Variant readings could also be introduced through explanatory glosses (secondary comments) or liturgical readings, thus creating a longer text. Below are a few of these types of changes:

Perhaps the preeminent example of a shorter versus longer reading is Mark 16:9–20. External analysis reveals that the last twelve verses of Mark are absent from many of the oldest manuscripts (Sinaiticus and Vaticanus [א and B], as well as an Old Latin codex, a Sinaitic Syriac manuscript) and about a hundred Armenian texts. Two of the most important church fathers, Clement of Alexandria and Origen, seem not to know about the additional verses. However, the traditional ending of Mark is confirmed through a number of other witnesses, including the fifth-century Codex Alexandrinus (A) and some of the earliest patristic witnesses, Irenaeus and the Diatessaron. Internal investigations have also led textual critics to conclude that the vocabulary and style of the last twelve verses of Mark 16 do not belong to Mark. Therefore, both external and internal evidence seem to support the shorter ending of Mark 16 at verse 8. So how did the extra verses find their way into the text? Likely, the last twelve verses were put in later by someone in an attempt to harmonize the text of Mark with the other Gospels concerning the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. In deference to the antiquity of the longer ending and its importance in the textual tradition, verses 9–20 have been included between double brackets in the Greek New Testament to indicate that its originality is uncertain.

We should understand that even though textual scholars conclude that the last twelve verses of Mark were not written by Mark, this conclusion does not mean that the story in those verses is false. One other important example of a large group of verses not found in most manuscripts is the story of the adulterous woman in John 7:53–8:11. Interestingly, the account is inserted in five other locations in various manuscripts, such as after John 7:44, 21:25, and even after Luke 21:38. Textual critics argue that the vocabulary and style
(internal evidence) of these verses differ considerably from the rest of the Gospel of John and that it interrupts the sequence of 7:52 and 8:12. Yet scholars generally agree that the antiquity of the story and its place in Christianity result in a beloved account that merits it a double-bracketed place in the Greek New Testament. Again, that John did not write these verses does not mean that the story of the adulterous woman is not true. However, the question of addition and omission is an important aspect of the textual critics’ work of determining whether a text is original.

Omission by homoeoteleuton. Another very common way for a scribe to accidentally shorten a text is through homoeoteleuton. This outcome occurs when text between two identical words or similar word endings is deleted as the scribe’s eye jumps from the first word to the second and omits the intermediate text. Mark 10:7, for example, reads “And for this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother and [unite with his wife and] the two will become one.” Here the text in brackets is accidentally deleted when the eye of the copyist jumps from “his mother and” to “the two will become one,” skipping the text in between (i.e., “unite with his wife and”). Note that the scribe’s eye has omitted the text (“unite with his wife”) between the first and second “and.” The above translation from the Greek with the missing text in brackets makes more sense.

Substitution. When a word or phrase in a variant reading is replaced by another word or phrase, it is termed substitution. This often results from harmonization. Sometimes a scribe may have felt a word or phrase was not precise enough or that the Greek grammar needed to be corrected or polished. Scholars need to resolve many of these issues through the use of Greek dictionaries, grammars, and concordances. In addition, textual critics should possess a firm grasp of the development of Christian theology and history. A few of the most prominent examples follow.

In Mark 1:2, the KJV phrase “in the prophets” can be found in some of the manuscripts, whereas other manuscripts read “in Isaiah the prophet.” Likely, a careful scribe recognized that the quotation is a conflation and includes part from Isaiah and part from Malachi. This explanation suggests that the original reading was probably “in Isaiah the prophet.”

When Jesus sent out His disciples in Luke 10:1, 17, did He send seventy-two as some manuscripts read or seventy as others attest (such as the King James Version)? Some textual scholars conclude that “seventy-two” was replaced with “seventy” because the latter is more common and in harmony with the Old Testament.
A difficult reading in Hebrews 2:9 has Jesus dying “without God.” In Greek, the phrase “by the grace” and “without” look very similar; the phrase could be a scribal error. Some scholars believe the original reading is “by the grace” and that it gave rise to the variant “without” when a scribe thought that Jesus was never without God (even though it is an idea in the Old Testament and in Mark 15:34, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me”).

Theological variants. Sometimes learned scribes made changes in the text to try to emphasize particular theological points, giving rise to certain variants. This practice includes changes that affected ideas about the nature of Christ. For instance, in Colossians 2:2, a certain manuscript reading equates Christ with God. If this were an original reading, it would explain the numerous variants making Christ unequal with God, for the idea of an equal relationship of Christ with God was avoided by the church.

One of the most obvious theological variants in the New Testament is the Johannine Comma (that is, a short clause of a sentence) or “Three Witnesses,” in 1 John 5:7–8, which reads, “For there are three that bear record [in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one. And there are three that bear witness in earth], the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one.” The bracketed portion identifies the variant part of the verses.

As the story goes, Erasmus, who is credited with producing the textus receptus, or received text, which became the precursor to the King James Version, was criticized for not including this clause in his New Testament. In answer, Erasmus replied that to his knowledge, no Greek manuscript with this clause existed. Later, a Greek manuscript was found or, more likely, was created to give this clause veracity. However, scholars have determined that this manuscript was likely written in Oxford about 1520 by a Franciscan friar who purportedly translated it out of the Latin Vulgate. In any case, this clause is not found in any Latin manuscript before the fourth century AD and not in any Greek manuscript before the sixteenth century AD. In the end, Erasmus may have included this clause, which is surely a late interpolation, because of pressure from his ecclesiastical leaders.

Other variants were created through such means as assimilation, which is the effort to smooth out both discrepancies in two (or more) parallel stories and the peculiarities of Greek word order and punctuation.
New Testament Textual Criticism Today

Today, the search goes on for the original writings. With computer technology and the finding of more and more manuscripts, textual critics have the best possible tools available to them. As a result, scholars are moving into what is called an “eclectic” approach, which means they prefer readings that have good manuscript support (that is, widespread support across text families, papyri, geographical witnesses, and patristic sources) and that are compatible with the context of the verses, demonstrating how a passage could have been the cause for variant readings. As we move into the twenty-first century, one thing is clear: the area of New Testament textual criticism is a dynamic field wherein scholars will continue to rethink the discipline, looking for new and better ways to advance the study of the text of the New Testament.

Conclusion

“Criticizing” the New Testament is not the role of New Testament textual studies. On the contrary, this discipline was created to aid the researchers in discovering the original inspired words of the authors. This task is certainly not an easy one. Sifting through the thousands of manuscripts in the form of papyri, majuscules, minuscules, and lectionaries; reading them in Latin, Syriac, Armenian, or another language; and using patristic commentary to identify what the New Testament authors originally wrote require skill, ingenuity, and talent. Textual criticism is a proven method to identify and appreciate the original words of God revealed to the New Testament authors.

Although it is not essential that Latter-day Saints become adept at textual criticism, it is interesting to see how this sacred text has given rise to such a large, complex field of study. Additionally, for Latter-day Saints in particular, it is important to know that a thorough textual study of the New Testament reveals one very important fact: the vast majority of variants between the manuscripts are minor and are not theologically significant. In other words, New Testament textual criticism assures us that we can have confidence in the word of God found in the New Testament.

Notes


3. Most of the time, these examples can be argued both for early and late manuscripts. For example, see the discussions for Matthew 27:16–17 about the name “Barabbas,” which can be found in both early and late manuscripts and which is also absent in both early and late manuscripts (see Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 2nd ed. [Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1994], 56).

4. Some lectionaries are written on paper, but most are on parchment. They are catalogued with an italic letter I and followed by a number. The highest number so far is I2403 (see Elliot and Moir, *Manuscripts and the Text of the New Testament*, 12–13).


9. See Metzger and Ehrman, *The Text of the New Testament*, 61. The authors also say, “It is interesting to note that if ‘Caesar Neron’ is spelled in Hebrew letters, their numerical value is 666—unless, that is, the optional nun is omitted at the end, in which case the total is 616.”


15. The Gospels in the Peshitta are closer to the Byzantine type of text. This was a major point in J. Reuben Clark, *Why the King James Version* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1956), wherein he argues that the Byzantine type of text is more reliable than the others (that is, Western and Alexandrian) because he perceived the Syriac would be closer to Jesus’s Aramaic original words. Likely, however, the Peshitta is a Syriac translation from a Greek prototype. The King James Version of the Bible is based on the Byzantine type of text.

16. Of course, this would be from a more Protestant perspective. Roman Catholics would likely consider the Greek manuscripts defective and the Latin Vulgate a later corrective.


25. See Elliot and Moir, *Manuscripts and the Text of the New Testament*, 37. Scholars estimate that as many as three hundred thousands variants have been found in all the manuscripts to date. Some Greek New Testaments have upwards of fifteen thousand, and other English New Testaments may have five hundred (Elliot and Moir, *Manuscripts and the Text of the New Testament*, 20–21).


27. For more detailed information on these sources, see Metzger, *A Textual Commentary*, 102–3.

28. For a more complex discussion of the internal evidence (mostly concerned with the style of wording and content) in support of the shorter versus longer ending of Mark 16, see Aland and Aland, *The Text of the New Testament*, 292–93.


30. Note the similarities of Mormon 2:22–24 with Mark 16:15–18.


33. See Metzger, *A Textual Commentary*, 50.

34. See Metzger, *A Textual Commentary*, 50–51, 73.

35. See Metzger, *A Textual Commentary*, 52, 150–51; see also Ezra 2:3–4 and Nehemiah 7:8–9. These examples show only that the number 72 is used as an ending for higher numbers such as 372 for Ezra 2:4 and Nehemiah 7:8. To me, I am not convinced enough to conclude that the number 72 was preferred in the Old Testament.


41. See also Elliot and Moir, *Manuscripts and the Text of the New Testament*, 69–76.
The Da Vinci Code, the Gospel of Judas, and Other Bad Ideas

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Jesus of Nazareth is currently headline news, thanks at least in part to Dan Brown’s novel The Da Vinci Code, the discovery of the Gospel of Judas, and recent media attention regarding the so-called “Lost Tomb of Jesus.” Often these attention-grabbing news stories are based on misconceptions—bad ideas—that can confuse those seeking to learn about the past. This heightened interest in these topics has generated a marvelous opportunity to talk about things that matter most, and therefore it is all good news.

The purpose of this essay is to review several bad ideas—misconceptions—about issues that are currently being debated in and out of the Church regarding these topics. We will conclude on a positive note by highlighting some of the good news about the “Good News.”

**Bad Idea Number 1. We can learn something about Jesus Christ and early Christianity from The Da Vinci Code.**

A surprising number of people claim they have learned something about Jesus Christ, the New Testament, and the history of the early Christian church through this novel. The Da Vinci Code has sold more than sixty million copies; therefore, the impact on many people’s perception on these topics is great. However, we need to remember several facts about the book.

First, The Da Vinci Code is a novel. Second, the author of The Da Vinci Code has no academic training that would suggest he is an expert on the New Testament and early Christianity. Third, the author of The
Da Vinci Code does not claim to be an apostle or prophet, and therefore he cannot provide prophetic insight to the past.

Given that the book is found in the fiction section of the bookstore, we might rightfully ask, “What is all the fuss about?” We may appropriately respond that it is all about a statement printed in the introduction of the book and other statements the author has made elsewhere. The author’s statement in the book has caused people to wonder what is fiction and what is fact in this novel: “All descriptions of artwork, architecture, documents, and secret rituals in this novel are accurate.”

The author’s statement has generated numerous inquiries regarding the historical accuracies of the context for the novel. As a result, a cottage industry has developed in an attempt to review the historical claims of the novel.

For our purposes, we can identify only a few examples of the flagrant historical problems found in the book—problems that both liberal and conservative scholars agree are blatantly inaccurate:

1. “More than eighty gospels were considered for the New Testament” by the early Church (Brown, The Da Vinci Code, 231). This is false. Only Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John were seriously considered for inclusion in the New Testament.

2. The New Testament canon “was collated by the pagan Roman emperor Constantine the Great” (231). This is false. The early Church had, by the end of the second century, identified most of the texts they felt were reliable—based on apostolic authority—long before the reign of Constantine (AD 306–37).

3. Until the Council of Nicea in the fourth century, Jesus was not considered divine but was a mortal, “viewed by His followers as . . . a great and powerful man, but a man nonetheless” (233). This is false. Paul’s own writings, dating from AD 49 until the mid-60s, contain specific references to Jesus’s divinity (see Galatians 2:20; Philippians 5:5–11).

4. The Catholic Church “tried very hard to suppress the release of [the Nag Hammadi codices],” which The Da Vinci Code mistakenly identifies as the “Coptic Scrolls” (234). This is false. The scholarly efforts to publish these texts were done independently of any religious body.

5. The Dead Sea Scrolls are “the earliest Christian records” (245). This is false. The vast majority of the scrolls date from the period before Jesus’s ministry. In those texts that date from the first century, there are no references to Jesus, the early Church or any New Testament writing.
In short, anyone who is interested in reading the novel should do so for entertainment and not to learn about the past.

**Bad Idea Number 2.** *The Gospel of Judas, along with other Gnostic texts such as the Nag Hammadi Library, provides insights into the life and ministry of Jesus Christ.*

Sensational stories in the media in early 2006—in the midst of *The Da Vinci Code* phenomenon—captured the attention of many people when it was reported that a new “Gospel” had been found. With typical media hype, the National Geographic Society announced that it was about to publish the long-lost Gospel of Judas (known to have existed from second-century sources). The codex (dating from AD 300 to 400) that contained the Gospel of Judas was torn and crumbling before conservation work began. Today, the text has been carefully restored and published.5

Gaye Strathearn, a faculty member at BYU and a Gnostic expert, provides a succinct description of the text: “The Gospel of Judas views Jesus and his ministry from a Gnostic perspective—a very different perspective from the one described in the canonical Gospels.”6 Because the Gospel of Judas was written well after any of the canonical Gospels, we can assume that Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John provide more reliable accounts of Jesus’s last twenty-four hours. Like other Gnostic texts, the Gospel of Judas was produced simply too late to provide us with any reliable historical information about Jesus and Judas. And it thoroughly reflects the heretical ideas of its Gnostic authors.

The Gospel of Judas fits well with a larger body of Gnostic texts. A significant collection of Gnostic texts was discovered in 1945 near Nag Hammadi, Egypt—hence the name by which they are known today, the Nag Hammadi Library. Dating from the third and fourth centuries AD, these texts have generated interest among many scholars and Latter-day Saints. Some Latter-day Saints have assumed that some golden nuggets could be mined from the Gnostic texts.

As is the case with the Gospel of Judas, nonscholars can access these documents in English, allowing them to determine how familiar the story, the doctrine, and the world of the Gnostic texts are. The authoritative translation of these Gnostic documents is found in James Robinson’s *The Nag Hammadi Library* (1978), updated in 1990.7

Professor Strathearn continues her assessment of Gnostic texts: “Latter-day Saints, however, must be cautious. They must guard against any endeavor to study Gnostic writings with the purpose of identifying proof-texts for their own doctrine. We have noted, for example, that the Gnostics had a very different understanding of the
nature and purpose of mortal existence and the identity of the God of the Old Testament. They believed that salvation was possible only for a select, predetermined group of people. In addition, their concept of ‘temple marriage’ was a celibate union between individuals and either Christ or their own divine image. Any Gnostic teachings found in these writings must be understood within their own Gnostic context.

It is important to remember the chronological context of the Nag Hammadi documents. Today we have copies of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John that date to AD 150 or earlier (as early as AD 125), meaning that these texts predate any other documents that purport to provide information about the historical Jesus, including the Nag Hammadi library. In some cases, we are only thirty or forty years removed from the original canonical Gospels in these early copies of the four Gospels—making the New Testament documents the earliest documents about Jesus and therefore the most reliable.

**Bad Idea Number 3. The Dead Sea Scrolls are proto-Mormon documents that can help us prove the Church is true.**

Since their initial discovery in 1947, the Dead Sea Scrolls have captured the attention of scholars and laypeople alike. The more than 850 texts found in the caves near the northwest corner of the Dead Sea are written in Aramaic and Hebrew, with a few in Greek, mostly on leather (gazelle, bovine, and ibex skin parchments). There is an example of a text written on metal, known today as the *Copper Scroll* (3QTreasure). Among these manuscripts were examples of every book from the Hebrew scriptures (except Esther) and many other texts, including the book of Enoch.

The significance and the importance of the contents of the Dead Sea Scrolls have been hotly debated and have generated a significant amount of speculation, especially on those texts previously unknown (nonbiblical material found among the manuscripts). Exaggerated reports among some Latter-day Saints have suggested that those who collected and copied these scrolls were proto-Mormons, even suggesting that many doctrines of the Restoration are found in these writings. As a result, some unwise members of the Church, including missionaries, have attempted to use the Dead Sea Scrolls as a means to bolster our claims—to prove the Church is true from these ancient records.

BYU professor Dana M. Pike provides a thoughtful response to these exaggerated claims: “Let me now answer the question posed in the title of this paper: ‘Is the Plan of Salvation Attested in the Dead Sea Scrolls?’ From a Latter-day Saint perspective, the answer is a definite no.” Dr. Pike’s assessment should not surprise us, given the historical context of
the people who gathered at Qumran. First, those who collected and produced the Dead Sea Scrolls, like other Jews during this period, lived in a partial state of apostasy without prophetic leaders. Second, the community did not respond to Jesus’s call to “follow him” (individuals may have). Third, unlike the Jewish Christians living in Jerusalem who were warned by revelation of the impending destruction and fled to safety, the Qumran community was destroyed, and the people were most likely killed by the Roman army during the Jewish War (AD 66–73).

A careful and thorough reading of the nonbiblical texts found at Qumran not only reveals the basic worldview of these people but also reveals some important gaps in their understanding of the plan of salvation. The texts discovered in the caves demonstrate that the people who wrote and preserved these texts, unlike the writers of the Book of Mormon, where not Christians in any way. They did not have a clear idea about the role of the Messiah ben David (they believed that the Messiah ben Aaron was superior). They did not believe that the Messiah was God’s Son. They did not believe in a personal Savior. As a result, they did not know about a final redemptive sacrifice. Clearly, they did not know about eternal ordinances performed by Melchizedek Priesthood authority. They did not know about the basic plan of salvation, including any knowledge about the degrees of glory and eternal progression.

Nevertheless, the scrolls are important. Two experts, both faithful Latter-day Saint scholars who can read the texts in their original languages and have the necessary academic training to place the scrolls in context, have provided a balanced assessment of the importance of the scrolls: “The scrolls, of course, do not contain the lost records we await, but they do provide new information about the transmission of the Bible, the Hebrew and Aramaic languages, and the variety of beliefs and practices of some Jews in the late Second Temple period.”

Fortunately, as a result of careful scholarly work, anyone interested in learning about what these people believed can discover for themselves, as the most important nonbiblical texts from Qumran are available in an English translation. Published in 2004, the revised edition of Geza Vermes’s *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls* in English provides a readable and authoritative translation of the important nonbiblical materials in the Dead Sea Scrolls.

**Bad Idea Number 4.** *The New Testament apocrypha contains the “plain and precious things” removed from the Bible.*

There are some major differences between the New Testament Apocrypha and the Dead Sea Scrolls or the Nag Hammadi library. First, the New Testament Apocrypha was not a collection of texts
found at a specific geographical location. They were not all compiled by a specific group of people. They are, in fact, a disparate compilation of a variety of materials collected over the centuries. They are not a collection in the sense that they constitute the sacred library of any specific group of people. They were composed over a long period of time by diverse individuals over a large geographical area.  

As with the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Gospel of Judas, and the Nag Hammadi texts, nonscholars can access the New Testament Apocrypha through English translations of these texts—allowing anyone to read what these texts have to offer.  

In contrast to the wild and exaggerated claims made by some Latter-day Saints who argue that these documents reveal some of the “plain and precious parts” lost from the Bible, there are voices of warning about the use and misuse of the texts. BYU professor Stephen E. Robinson has written, “The degree to which the apocryphal literature proves that the Latter-day Saints are right or supports our beliefs has been greatly exaggerated in the unofficial literature of the Church, and I believe that those who make these exaggerated claims either do so in ignorance or else perpetrate a ‘pious fraud.’ Some of the tapes and other material that circulate in the Church on the subject are very misleading.”

Robinson adds an important context to his discussion: “I want to affirm the importance of the apocryphal literature for our understanding of biblical history, of biblical languages, and of the background of the biblical books themselves. There is much valuable information here for the Latter-day Saints if we understand the texts for what they really are and use them appropriately. It is not the use of this literature that is objectionable, but the misuse. For if we try to pass them off as ‘hidden scriptures,’ and otherwise misrepresent them in misguidedly trying to prove that the Church is true, we shall, like the comforters of Job, ‘speak the thing that is not right,’ and become as much as the original pseudonymous authors ‘liars for God.”

**Bad Idea Number 5. The 1611 King James Version is a new revelation from God and is superior to the original Hebrew and Greek texts on which the translation was based.**

The King James Version of the Bible (KJV) was first published in 1611. This English translation has had immense influence. However, many do not realize that there are several different editions of the KJV. As a result, any dogmatic assertions about the 1611 edition must be tempered by the fact that the current KJV used by most English-speaking readers, including members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, is not the 1611 edition.
During the past fifty years, strong feelings about the KJV have emerged, mostly in reaction to some modern-day translation efforts that purportedly deemphasize the divinity of Jesus Christ and the ability of Old Testament prophets to see beyond their own day. James R. White has outlined five different positions regarding the KJV that are held by various Christian groups today, including some rather extreme and untenable positions that divert our attention from those things that matter most.

First, many people love the KJV because the language is majestic and the translation reveals a deep respect for Jesus Christ. Second, some people believe the Hebrew and Greek texts used by the KJV translators in the seventeenth century are superior to any other text, even those texts that predate those used by the KJV translators. Third, some people argue that the Lord preserved the Hebrew and Greek texts used by the translators for His special purpose, and therefore we should rely upon those texts above all others. Fourth, some people have claimed that the KJV is an inspired translation, and therefore any question about the reliability of the manuscripts is not important. Fifth, some believe that the KJV is not simply an inspired translation but that it is, in fact, a new revelation from God, and therefore the text should be preferred above any ancient manuscript, including the originals. The most extreme position argues that the KJV existed in heaven before the creation of the world and that Moses, Isaiah, Matthew, and Paul read the 1611 KJV.

The following important contributions to the Restoration have come because of the KJV:

1. Joseph Smith read from a KJV Bible in the spring of 1820, and that event led him to seek God in prayer, thereby opening a new dispensation.

2. Joseph Smith read from a KJV Bible (1830–33) during his work on the text (JST), which blessed the Church through increased understanding of God’s plan.

3. The KJV provides the language of the Restoration in English.
   a. It is the language of the Book of Mormon translation.
   b. It is the language of the Doctrine and Covenants.
   c. It is the language of the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible. (As has been adequately demonstrated by Kent P. Jackson, the JST does demonstrate the Prophet’s efforts to simplify and modernize the KJV for a modern audience.)
   d. It is the language of prayer.

The KJV will continue to play a significant role among the English-speaking members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.
However, it is important to remember some facts about the edition we currently use, as noted above.

The 1979 Latter-day Saint edition used the 1769 Benjamin Blayney edition of the King James Version. It contains significant differences from the original 1611 edition and is also slightly different from that used by the Prophet Joseph Smith and the majority of the early Saints—Joseph Smith’s Bible was based on the 1769 Cambridge University Press edition (which was more or less identical to the current LDS edition) but with additional modernizations.

**Bad Idea Number 6. The Joseph Smith Translation is only a footnote to the King James Version text.**

The current edition of the Bible published by the Church (1979) provides some six hundred Joseph Smith Translation verses, many of them as notes at the bottom of the page or included as an appendix at the end. The position of these verses, however, does not imply any sort of inferior status. The Joseph Smith Translation (JST) is of the greatest importance and significance to Latter-day Saints in their study of the Bible.

The Prophet’s work on the New Translation began in June 1830 and proceeded through 1833, when he finished his work on the Bible (at least the major effort). Kent P. Jackson, one of the most important JST scholars in the Church today, has described the Prophet’s efforts as “a careful reading of the Bible to revise and make corrections to it as prompted by revelation.”

The significance of Joseph Smith’s efforts to translate the Bible for himself and the Church cannot fully be told. It was his major focus from June 1830 through July 1833 and was one of the means through which the Lord tutored his Prophet and was the catalyst for many revelations now found in the Doctrine and Covenants (see, for example, D&C 76).

One historian captured the importance of the New Translation when he compared the Prophet’s efforts with academic translations that require language skills, dictionaries, and ancient texts: “Unlike the scholarly translators, [Joseph Smith] went back beyond the existing texts to the minds of the prophets, and through them to the mind of God.”

We owe an immense debt to several people and groups for preserving the JST and printings of the Prophet’s work. Foremost among the Latter-day Saints is Robert J. Matthews, who pioneered the effort to make the JST known among Church members. He casts a long shadow across the landscape. Two giants, Scott H. Faulring and Kent P. Jackson, stand in that shadow and continue to make enduring contributions to our understanding of the importance of the Prophet’s
work, which he described as a “branch of [his] calling.” In 1996, they began the lengthy process of preparing for publication a typographic transcription of the original manuscripts of the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible. The result is a groundbreaking 851-page volume, published by the Religious Studies Center.

Based on the pioneering work of Scott H. Faulring, Kent P. Jackson, and Robert J. Matthews, BYU professor Thomas A. Wayment has provided the most correct and handy comparative edition of the JST New Testament available to date. This is an important contribution to any New Testament study.

**Bad Idea Number 7.** New Testament scholars are evil, they are atheists (agnostic at best), and they deserve to go to you-know-where.

Certainly, just as we know of bad doctors, lawyers, and mechanics, we can identify New Testament scholars who question the reliability of the New Testament in reconstructing the life of Jesus of Nazareth. However, we would be unwise and unfair to categorize an entire group based on some individuals within that group. In fact, an increasing number of scholars are deeply committed disciples of Jesus Christ. Inside and outside the Church, many stalwart Christians and scholars not only respond to critics of the New Testament but also provide all who will listen and read thoughtful discussions regarding the life of the one whom God had sent to save the cosmos.

Joseph Smith is an example of one who learned “by study and also by faith” (D&C 88:118). The Lord called Joseph Smith to provide three important translations: the Book of Mormon, the Book of Abraham, and the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible. Joseph’s efforts in these regards might be better understood as an inspired translation because he did not learn any ancient languages to accomplish his task.

However, we sometimes forget that the Prophet did not see his approach to studying the word of God as an either-or proposition. Joseph took time to follow the Lord’s counsel to “study and learn, and become acquainted with all good books, and with languages, tongues, and people” (D&C 90:15). He studied ancient languages and modern languages in his effort to understand the scriptures.

Joseph Smith noted: “Attended the school and read and translated with my class as usual. My soul delights in reading the word of the Lord in the original, and I am determined to pursue the study of the languages, until I shall become master of them, if I am permitted to live long enough.” On another occasion, Joseph opined, “Our latitude and longitude can be determined in the original Hebrew with far greater accuracy than in the English version.”
President Spencer W. Kimball offered the following challenge to the Brigham Young University faculty, including religious education faculty: “Your double heritage and dual concerns with the secular and the spiritual require you to be ‘bilingual.’ As LDS scholars, you must speak with authority and excellence to your professional colleagues in the language of scholarship, and you must also be literate in the language of spiritual things. We must be more bilingual, in that sense, to fulfill our promise in the second century of BYU.”

**Bad Idea Number 8. Past Latter-day Saint scholarship is the best scholarship.**

An increasing number of Latter-day Saint scholars trained in various disciplines relating to New Testament studies (ancient history, Greek and Latin, textual criticism, Roman civilization, and geography) are reexamining sources (old and recently discovered), including the New Testament text itself. Taking advantage of recent discoveries and modern technologies, faithful scholars are in a position to clarify the historical context and linguistic nuances of the biblical texts.

Latter-day Saint scholars, working from within the framework of the doctrinal standard established by past and present Church authorities who have written about the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, are attempting to provide additional historical and cultural context inside the parameters established by these authorized servants.

Sometimes students resist any discussions that go beyond some previously published work, especially works that have become classics in the truest sense. Although some literary classics, such as Dickens’s *David Copperfield*, probably never should be updated, other classics that deal with history and science probably should be updated when new information comes to light.

Elder James E. Talmage, whose language and sensitivity in describing the life of Christ may never be surpassed, has provided one of the most important books, *Jesus the Christ*, from which current Latter-day Saint scholars often commence. We should speak with great reverence and even awe when approaching this book, and we should especially appreciate Elder Talmage’s use of language and testimony. Yet we should provide a context to our discussion in light of newly discovered historical, cultural, and language insights.

*Jesus the Christ*, a classic in the truest sense, continues to play a significant role in the lives of those who are seeking to understand the life of the Master. However, Elder Talmage’s scholarship reflects what was known of history and scriptures in the late 1880s. He did not have access to the Joseph Smith Translation, the Dead Sea Scrolls, other
recently discovered texts, or the many archaeological and historical advances that open new windows of understanding on the world of the first century. Moreover, Elder Talmage was not aware of and did not use the Prophet Joseph Smith’s doctrinal contributions to the text itself.\textsuperscript{33}

If Elder Talmage were alive today and had an opportunity to update his marvelous prose (based on the fact that he carefully studied and quoted from scholars of other faiths before writing his masterpiece), he would most likely take advantage of the additional light and knowledge God has revealed through various means, including remarkable discoveries dealing directly with the New Testament text and the world of Jesus (see Articles of Faith 1:9).

Current scholars build upon the work of previous generations. In this sense, they stand on the shoulders of giants, an outcome that allows them to see further than was possible in the past. Scholars of an earlier generation anticipate that their work will be added upon just as they improved upon the work of the generation before them.

The works of all scholars, past and present, should be judged according to their context, using a standard such as that given in the introduction of the LDS Bible Dictionary: “This dictionary . . . is not intended as an official or revealed endorsement by the Church of the doctrinal, historical, cultural, and other matters set forth. Many of the items have been drawn from the best available scholarship of the world and are subject to reevaluation based on new research and discoveries or on new revelation.”\textsuperscript{34}

The Good News about the “Good News”

We should not end our discussion with the bad ideas that are floating around. I firmly believe that the glass is not half empty but is, in fact, half full. This is the best time to be alive. During this time of increased media attention to the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, the New Testament, and the history of the early Christian church, Latter-day Saints have much to be grateful for as we reflect upon what the Lord has done and what He continues to do. We are blessed with a better understanding of His glorious gospel through divine witnesses of His ministry—modern prophets and apostles who testify of His continuing presence in the Church. We also benefit from the efforts of faithful scholars to provide us a rich context for the good news. That good news includes the following:

1. Some of those who met Jesus along the way decided to write down what He said and did.
2. Some early Christians collected the writings of the New Testament during a critical period when the writings could have been lost.

3. The early Church decided to preserve the books now contained in the New Testament.

4. The early Christian Church decided not to include the books that compose the New Testament Apocrypha.\textsuperscript{35}


6. Martin Luther, William Tyndale, and others learned biblical languages—Hebrew and Greek—so they could translate the Bible because they knew that the Bible was more authoritative in the original languages than any translation.

7. The 1611 KJV was translated by scholars with remarkable skills—including knowledge of Hebrew and Greek—producing an important English version of the Bible that would influence the Restoration.

8. Protestant translators and publishers dedicated their lives to making the Bible available to the whole world in the languages of common people.\textsuperscript{36}

9. Archaeological advances, including the discovery of early New Testament manuscripts, provide scholars better sources than we had a century ago to help us reconstruct the world of Jesus and the Apostles.

10. Recent discoveries and advances in our understanding of early New Testament manuscripts enable us to reconstruct the New Testament text better than was possible in the day of the KJV translators.

11. God called Joseph Smith to speak again in the name of the Lord, providing prophetic insight and application to the New Testament. Additionally, the Lord called successors who continued to provide prophetic insight to New Testament scripture.

12. The Church promotes the education of both the spirit and the mind—including the study of ancient history and biblical languages.

13. The Church released the 1979 edition of the KJV with important Bible helps prepared by some of the best scholars of the Church under the direction of the Church’s scripture committee: Greek and Hebrew alternative translations (GR/HEB), explanations of idioms and difficult constructions (IE), the inclusion of Joseph Smith Translation material in the footnotes and the appendix (JST), Bible Dictionary, and Topical Guide.
14. The Lord is pouring out His Spirit, touching the hearts of many Latter-day Saints to pursue degrees in ancient history and biblical languages. Their consecrated work helps us to have a deeper appreciation for context of the story that matters most—the life and ministry of God’s unique Son.

The Best News of All

We can thank the Lord for His goodness, especially when we consider the points mentioned above. However, the best news of all is a powerful witness of God’s love for us through His Son, Jesus Christ.

Paul succinctly outlines the best news of all: “When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law” (Galatians 4:4–5).37

In other words, God did not send Jesus a year too early or a year too late—but at the very right time. That God “sent” His Son before Jesus was born seems the best way to understand Paul’s passage; Jesus was foreordained to complete God’s rescue mission of the cosmos (see Revelation 13:8).

As several scholars have noted, J. B. Lightfoot’s discovery of a chiastic structure in this pericope further highlights the importance of the message:

A. God sent his Son
B. Born under the Law
B’. To redeem those under the law
A’. That we might receive adoption as sons38

Our story ends where it began, nearly two thousand years ago in the land where Jesus walked and where He talked about the “Good News.” One of His disciples, one who witnessed the miracle of His life, death, and Resurrection, left us his witness, his testimony, in the form of a book—the Gospel of John. As he concluded his story of the Lamb of God, John testified, “But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name” (John 20:31).  

Notes

2. For example, Richard Neitzel Holzapfel, Andrew Skinner, and Thomas Wayment, What Da Vinci Didn’t Know: An LDS Perspective (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2006). Additionally, there is a vast collection of non-LDS literature by competent scholars who deal with the historical problems found throughout the novel, including two thoughtful reviews, Bart D. Ehrman, Truth and Fiction in


10. Hugh Nibley was one of the first trained Latter-day Saint scholars to focus attention to the newly discovered ancient Jewish and Christian manuscripts that suddenly burst on the scene in the 1940s. The initial enthusiasm about the value of these texts was not only well meaning but also raised some questions about previously held assumptions concerning first-century Judaism and early Christianity. After those early investigations, thoughtful and careful work built upon or beginning with these early explorations on the relationship between the restored gospel and ancient documents has provided a clearer picture and, as a result, a more mature and cautious context to the discussions of the importance of these texts.


12. Parry and Pike, LDS Perspectives on the Dead Sea Scrolls, vii. This volume is a helpful introduction to the entire subject in the context of the restored gospel.


16. I have come to believe that Moses 1:41 suggests that restoration of the “plain and precious” truths will come through anointed prophetic leaders, such as Joseph Smith in the case of the Book of Moses, not by purely scholarly activity. Certainly, academics have a place in the continuing pursuit of truth through their scholarly activities to provide nuanced interpretations of historical material as they
attempt to reconstruct the past. The word of the Lord, however, will mostly likely come through those appointed by God to bring forth new scripture to the world (see 1 Nephi 13:39–40).


19. This is particularly true of the Revised Standard Version, first published in 1962. However, other modern translations have not only accessed earlier manuscripts, thus getting us closer to the original autographs, but also have been completed by competent scholars who are dedicated disciples and who believe in the divinity of Jesus Christ and God.


29. Smith, History of the Church, 2:396.


33. For this doctrinal contribution, see Kent P. Jackson, ed. and comp., Joseph Smith's Commentary on the Bible (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1994).

34. Bible Dictionary, preface, 600; emphasis added.

35. “It is safe to say, based on current research, that every apocryphal text that claims to preserve the teachings of a New Testament figure was forged. The same cannot be said of the canonical texts, which indicates that the early Church was quite successful at separating the wheat from the chaff. At the same time, however, the apocryphal literature can inform us about the development of the Church in
the postapostolic era” (Wayment, “False Gospels,” 300).


37. Additionally, Paul may have preserved for us in this pericope a pre-Pauline formula—something that existed in the early Church.

Spencer Woolley Kimball was born on March 28, 1895, in Salt Lake City. He is the sixth child of Andrew and Olive Woolley Kimball. Olive’s patriarchal blessing promised her, “Thy sons shall be stars of the first magnitude in thy crown and . . . vigorous in helping to direct the purposes of God in this last dispensation.” This blessing proved true as Spencer W. Kimball, small in stature but mighty in faith, inspired the Church to lengthen its stride and broaden its vision.

Roots in Arizona

When Spencer was three, the First Presidency called his father to serve as president of the St. Joseph Stake in Arizona. Andrew and Olive moved their family of eight from a comfortable home in Salt Lake City to Thatcher, Arizona, in the fertile Gila Valley, where they settled on ten acres of land purchased by the stake.

Although Spencer later joked of being “the laziest boy that ever lived” and of being “allergic to running except in play,” he developed a deep-rooted work ethic as he participated in the family chores of feeding hogs, milking cows, hauling hay, and irrigating crops. His father was a man of precision who required the very best from his sons. This work ethic ingrained in Spencer a duty to always do his finest work. Although Andrew Kimball was strict, Spencer greatly admired his father, who he believed was the most important man in Arizona, and consciously tried to emulate him by developing traits such as faith, frugality, integrity, and industry.
Spencer was a good-natured youth, and, according to his older brother, “everybody liked Spencer.” His childhood years were not easy because they were filled with trying experiences that tempered his character and developed spiritual devotion, firm faith, and testimony. At an early age, Spencer had many opportunities for spiritual growth. He witnessed the power of fasting when his stake fasted for rain for their parched crops, he learned of receiving guidance after offering sincere prayers of need, and he witnessed the power of the priesthood as his father pronounced a priesthood blessing on a young neighbor boy who was miraculously healed.

Throughout Spencer’s youth, he had many physical trials and was even spared from death on several occasions. For example, at the age of seven, he nearly drowned while swimming in a pond before his father pulled him to safety. Before age ten, he contracted Bell’s palsy, which paralyzed the muscles in his face for months before he finally recovered. Several years later, he contracted typhoid fever, which required seven weeks to restore his health. Little did Spencer realize that he would face even more physical challenges and be spared from further life-threatening circumstances throughout his life. Other challenges forged the character of Spencer. His sister Fannie died on his ninth birthday, and two years later, Olive Kimball passed away. The Kimball home felt empty without their mother, and Spencer’s thirteen-year-old sister, Ruth, dropped out of school so she could tend the house and young children full time. Spencer called Ruth their “angel-mother.” Shortly after his mother’s funeral, Spencer’s two-year-old sister, Rachel, became critically ill with diphtheria and died.

Spencer was very active in his ward. He served as deacons quorum president and Sunday School chorister and gained a reputation for his near-perfect attendance at Church meetings. He loved singing
the hymns and had a beautiful baritone voice. His father encouraged the children to learn to play the piano by allowing them to stop work in the hot afternoons and sit in the cool parlor and practice. Spencer learned to play by ear and, by the time he was fourteen, joined a band that played on the weekends to earn some spending money. Spencer was always the life of the party and delighted his friends with his quick wit and good nature—personality traits that would serve him and others well throughout his life.

Spencer attended high school at the Gila Academy, where he was elected each year as president of his school class. Not only was Spencer an excellent student but also he was the star forward on the St. Joseph’s Stake basketball team and played tennis and baseball. At Spencer’s high school graduation ceremony, he received a shock as his father announced to the audience that his son would be serving a mission instead of starting college. Spencer readily accepted the invitation and was called to the Swiss-German Mission. Because of the pending crisis of World War I, however, Spencer was reassigned to the Central States Mission, where he served faithfully in his duties as a missionary and as the president of the East Missouri Conference.

**Marriage and Professional Life**

Upon returning to Arizona from his missionary service, Spencer saw a picture of Camilla Eyring, a teacher at the Gila Academy, in the newspaper. He boldly informed a friend, “That’s the girl I’m going to marry.” Spencer dated Camilla for a short time before he left to study at Brigham Young University. After only four weeks at BYU, his studies were cut short because of the war draft, and Spencer returned to Arizona to prepare for military service. It didn’t take long for Spencer to court Camilla after his return home. Spencer W. Kimball and Camilla Eyring were married November 16, 1917.
Spencer worked several odd jobs until he found employment as a bank clerk. In time, Spencer and Camilla had four children: Spencer LeVan, Olive Beth, Andrew, and Edward. While raising his family, Spencer was active in his profession, his community, and the Church. After many years of working at a bank, Spencer decided to partner with Joseph Greenhalgh and form an insurance company that handled investments and real estate. Meanwhile, he remained civically active, serving on the Thatcher City Council, as Rotary club president, and later as a prestigious Rotary district governor. He also started a local radio station, served as director of the Arizona Association of Insurance Agents, and sat on the Safford City Council, the board of the Chamber of Commerce, the board of the Gila College (formerly the Academy), the board of the Red Cross, and the Arizona Teachers Retirement Board. Spencer also served as stake clerk, as second counselor in the stake presidency, and as stake president.

**Call to the Apostleship**

On July 8, 1943, Spencer had just arrived home for lunch when he received a telephone call from President J. Reuben Clark Jr. in Salt Lake City, who, much to Spencer’s surprise, invited him to serve in the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. On Friday, October 1, 1943, Spencer was sustained in general conference, and on October 7, 1943, he was ordained by President Heber J. Grant.

Elder Kimball’s new schedule was heavy and fast-paced. It included assignments of visiting stake conferences, designating missionary assignments, counseling individuals and couples with moral problems, and supervising missionary work in South America and Great Britain. In 1946, President George A. Smith gave Elder Kimball a special assignment to “take charge and watch after the Indians in all the world.” Because Elder Kimball believed education would unlock the door of opportunity, he established Church schools on the reservations and later initiated the Indian Student Placement Program. His work among the Native Americans was tireless, and Harold B. Lee called him “the great Indian defender.” Despite the pressures of his general Church responsibilities, Elder Kimball worried about staying close to his family—especially his children. He wrote in his journal of his earnest desire to be a good father: “I am trying hard to keep close to my boys and keep their love and respect and palship!”

In 1959, after years of counseling troubled individuals, missionaries, and other members of the Church seeking forgiveness, Elder
Kimball began to convert his notes and scriptures into an “extensive treatise on repentance.” After eight years of work, the manuscript was published as *The Miracle of Forgiveness.* This book is still one of the most-used references on repentance.

Elder Kimball’s health continued to plague him. He persevered through boils, ulcers, several heart attacks, open heart surgery, impaired hearing, and cancer of the larynx. Harold B. Lee, a fellow Apostle and a close personal friend, once said, “Spencer lives from blessing to blessing.” Because of the cancer in his throat, surgeons removed most of Elder Kimball’s vocal cords in 1956, leaving him with a quiet, raspy, hoarse voice. The cancer returned fifteen years later, requiring radiation treatments. After the successful treatments, Elder Kimball began wearing a microphone attached to his glasses to amplify his weak voice. Despite his Job-like challenges, he faithfully fulfilled his assignments with determined exactness and enthusiasm.

In 1970, Elder Kimball was set apart as Acting President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, and on July 7, 1972, he was set apart as President of that quorum. Seventeen months later, President Harold B. Lee died unexpectedly, and on December 30, 1973, at the age of seventy-eight, Spencer W. Kimball succeeded him as the twelfth President of the Church.
Highlights of His Presidency

President Kimball believed that the Church had a glorious destiny and fully intended to help facilitate its fulfillment. He clearly understood that if the Church were to realize this destiny, the Church and its membership could no longer be complacent. In October 1974, President Kimball taught, “So much depends upon our willingness to make up our minds, collectively and individually, that present levels of performance are not acceptable, either to ourselves or to the Lord. In saying that, I am not calling for flashy, temporary differences in our performance levels, but a quiet resolve . . . to do a better job, to lengthen our stride.” The phrase “Lengthen your stride” became a favorite of the members—a motto of sorts. Sensing this, President Kimball later elaborated, “The ‘lengthening of our stride’ suggests urgency instead of hesitancy, ‘now,’ instead of tomorrow; it suggests not only an acceleration, but efficiency. It suggests, too, that the whole body of the Church move forward in unison with a quickened pace and pulse, doing our duty with all our heart, instead of halfheartedly.”

The acceptance of President Kimball’s call for the Church to lengthen its stride was evident during his administration as the Church experienced unprecedented expansion in many different ways. For example, President Kimball envisioned an “army of missionaries,” which would be impossible to obtain with only a fraction of young men.
choosing to serve a mission.\textsuperscript{12} Thus, President Kimball spoke in certain terms of a young man’s responsibility to serve a mission. When asked if every young man should go on a mission, he firmly responded, “The answer has been given by the Lord. It is ‘Yes.’”\textsuperscript{13} As a result, the missionary force doubled, and fifty-one new missions were created. The number of stakes more than doubled, accommodating more than two million converts during his presidency, and the total Church membership increased from 3.3 million to 5.7 million.

In addition to the expansion of full-time missionary work, efforts to spread the gospel in other ways were implemented. Area conferences on six different continents were held, and President Kimball presided over fifty-eight solemn assemblies. Satellite technology was implemented to broadcast general conference and other training sessions throughout the world. In 1975–76, President Kimball reorganized the First Quorum of the Seventy by absorbing the Assistants to the Twelve into the First Quorum and creating emeritus status for members of advanced age in the Quorum. The unprecedented expansion included temple worship and building as well. When the use of computer technology expanded, the name-extraction program dramatically increased the need for more temple work to be done. As a result, the fifteen temples in operation when President Kimball began his administration in 1974 expanded to thirty-seven temples by 1985—a 250 percent increase. Under the direction of President Kimball, the Church published a new edition of the standard works with new study aids. The Book of Mormon was also given the subtitle “Another Testament of Jesus Christ.”

The most remarkable event during President Kimball’s administration was the announcement in 1978 extending the priesthood to all worthy males and allowing all worthy members to participate in temple ordinances.\textsuperscript{14} President Kimball had long considered this event, and on June 7, 1978, the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles met in the Salt Lake Temple to fast and pray for direction. After each member of the First Presidency and Twelve had spoken, they united in formal prayer with President Kimball acting as voice. According to Elder Bruce R. McConkie, “It was during this prayer that the revelation came” and “all doubt and uncertainty fled.”\textsuperscript{15} The revelation brought the Church closer to President Kimball’s goal of having the gospel taught throughout the world.

Throughout President Kimball’s administration, he emphasized the importance of marriage and family. “Marriage is perhaps the most vital of all decisions and has the most far-reaching effects,” he taught, “for it has
to do not only with immediate happiness, but also with eternal joys.” He encouraged members to work at making their marriages strong and happy, for it was his belief that “almost any good man and any good woman can have happiness and a successful marriage if both are willing to pay the price.” President Kimball maintained that proper home life, good parental guidance, and proper family leadership were “the panacea for the ailments of the world, a cure for spiritual and emotional diseases, a remedy for problems.”

During President Kimball’s administration, family home evening was reemphasized, and the Saints were admonished to “give preference in time and energy . . . and observe properly and conscientiously the family home evening.” In another move to strengthen the family, the Church consolidated the meeting schedule in 1980. President Kimball emphasized that the consolidated schedule would permit Church leaders and Church members to have more time with their family every Sunday. President Kimball urged, “Please see to it that this is done, so that you priesthood brethren do not neglect your own families and so that our wonderful stake presidents, bishops, branch and quorum presidents, and others can do likewise.”

In an effort to prepare the youth for living in an environment of failing marriages and weakening moral standards, President Kimball vigorously taught the necessity of strict standards of moral cleanliness and practices that would nurture relationships and ultimately lead to worthy temple marriages. It was President Kimball, for example, who emphasized that the youth of the Church should not date before sixteen years of age. He also emphasized that progression to a happy adulthood should be metered by taking “experiences in proper turn” (friendship and acquaintances, young men serving a mission, courting, and then temple marriage). President Kimball warned that “in any other sequence he [a person] could run into difficulty.”
President Kimball felt that the Church’s stand on morality needed to be taught boldly. “Old values are upheld by the Church not because they are old,” he said, “but rather because through the ages they have proved right. It will always be the rule.” As a result, President Kimball spoke frankly about pornography, petting, adultery, homosexuality, masturbation, and lust. His boldness was designed to warn the Saints because of the turbulent and deceitful times. “This is a most unpleasant subject to dwell upon,” President Kimball said, “but I am pressed to speak of it boldly so that no youth in the Church will ever have any question in his mind as to the illicit and diabolical nature of this perverse program.”

Throughout his ministry, President Kimball stressed a model of provident living for the Saints, placing an emphasis on personal and family preparedness. Such preparation included having a “year’s supply of commodities,” planting and eating from a garden, keeping a personal journal, and even cleaning up homes and farms.

In the 1970s, the Church openly opposed the proposed Equal Rights Amendment to the Constitution of the United States, feeling that the wording of the amendment would ultimately weaken both marriage and the family. As a result, President Kimball often spoke of the importance of womanhood. “Let others selfishly pursue false values,” President Kimball said, “but God has given to you the tremendous tasks of nurturing families, friends, and neighbors, just as men are to provide. But both husband and wife are to be parents!”

In 1980, under the direction of President Kimball, the First Presidency issued a proclamation to the world from the Peter Whitmer Sr. home in Fayette, New York. The proclamation affirmed, among other things, the reality of the Restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon, the importance of temple work, and the divine nature of the family.

A Man of Vision

President Kimball suffered from three brain hemorrhages (1979–81) that ultimately left him unable to meet his demanding schedule. In 1981, Gordon B. Hinckley was called as an additional counselor to the First Presidency to help bear the heavy load of Presidents Kimball, N. Eldon Tanner, and Marion G. Romney, all of whom had failing health. President Kimball died on November 5, 1985, in Salt Lake City at age ninety. His wife, Camilla, died almost two years later on September 20, 1987.

President Kimball was beloved throughout the world by members and nonmembers alike. He is remembered for his sincere humility,
affable wit, kindness, bold determination, and enduring work ethic. President Kimball personally emulated his own challenge of lengthening one’s stride and quickening one’s pace. He was more than a man of vision; he was a man of hard work and action. He felt that “as important as it is to have this vision in mind, defining and describing Zion will not bring it about.” He then clarified: “That can only be done through consistent and concerted daily effort by every single member of the Church. No matter what the cost in toil or sacrifice, we must ‘do it.’ That is one of my favorite phrases: ‘Do It.’”

It is no wonder that the Church rallied behind President Spencer W. Kimball, a man who emulated his own teachings in doing whatever the Lord asked.

Notes

2. Edward L. Kimball and Andrew E. Kimball Jr., *Spencer W. Kimball: Twelfth President of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1977), 38.
23. Kimball, “President Kimball Speaks Out on Morality,” 42.
24. Kimball, “President Kimball Speaks Out on Morality,” 43.
New Publications

**Legacy of Sacrifice: Missionaries to Scandinavia, 1872–94**

*By Susan Easton Black, Shauna C. Anderson, and Ruth Ellen Maness*

It takes courage to accept a religion that requires sacrifices of the heart. The nineteenth-century Scandinavian converts are a commendable example of this courage. They gave up worldly goods, standing in the community, and sometimes their life for their newfound beliefs. As a family history resource, this compilation contains vital information, scrupulously researched, about each of these valiant missionaries. Other features include explanations of surnames in Scandinavian countries, a pronunciation guide and photos.

$39.95, 978-0-8425-2668-5

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**Celebrating Easter: The 2006 BYU Easter Conference**

*Edited by Thomas A. Wayment and Keith J. Wilson*

Some of the most recognized verses in all of scripture reflect the triumph of Easter: “And he saith unto them, Be not affrighted: Ye seek Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified: he is risen; he is not here: behold the place where they laid him” (Mark 16:6). This volume is a collection of essays from the 2006 BYU Easter Conference and reflects some of the ways in which we think about Easter. Topics ranged from direct studies about how Latter-day Saint celebrate and teach Easter to technical aspects of the Savior’s trial and His Jewish antagonists’ approach to His miracles.

Ohio became the first gathering place for the Saints in this dispensation when the Lord declared, “A commandment I give unto the church, that it is expedient in me that they should assemble together at the Ohio” (D&C 37:3). Almost half of the revelations in the Doctrine and Covenants were received in Ohio. Soon, stretching northward into Canada, the message of the restored gospel reached the homes of John Taylor, Mary Fielding, and other early converts. Contributors include Richard E. Bennett, David F. Boone, Richard O. Cowan, and Kip Sperry.

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Who wrote the New Testament? Did Matthew really write Matthew? Who decided which ancient Gospels to include and which to reject? How were the New Testament’s books written, and how did they make their way into the Bible? Who decided which ancient books were scripture, and who decided the sequence that we have today? How the New Testament Came to Be, the papers of the 2006 Sperry Symposium, explores these questions and others in the light of ancient history, the earliest New Testament texts, and modern revelation.

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Nineteenth-Century Saints at War

Nineteenth-Century Saints at War starts where other books on the topic end, with insights on the experiences of men and women who participated in the American wars of the nineteenth century. The authors highlight the various responses of individual Latter-day Saints and the Church itself to the national conflicts that engulfed America during a turbulent
century. These men and women were both citizens of the United States and also citizens of the kingdom of God.


Edited by Frank F. Judd Jr. and Gaye Strathearn

“The challenge of Jesus was to replace the rigid, technical ‘thou shalt not’ of the law of Moses that the spiritually immature children of Israel needed with the spirit of the ‘better testament,’” writes President James E. Faust in his chapter “A Surety of a Better Testament.” This volume brings together some of the most instructive and inspirational articles ever written on the New Testament. Topics include the life of Jesus Christ, the culture in which He lived, and the obstacles He and His Apostles confronted in trying to teach the higher law. Featured authors include President James E. Faust; Elders John K. Carmack, Jay E. Jensen, L. Aldin Porter, and Gerald N. Lund; and many religious educators at Brigham Young University.

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Mormon Thoroughfare: A History of the Church in Illinois, 1830–1839
By Marlene C. Kettley, Arnold K. Garr, and Craig K. Manscill

Latter-day Saints may think Church history in Illinois began in 1839 with the establishment of the city of Nauvoo. However, Illinois became the Mormon thoroughfare of the 1830s when the missionaries to the Lamanites unexpectedly had to cross the state on their trip from Ohio to Missouri. This occurrence made Illinois one of only four states to receive missionaries in the year 1830. The Church grew rapidly, and by 1835 it was likely the fourth largest religious body in the state. The book tells of the conversion of future Apostle Charles C. Rich in the 1830s. It also talks about the Latter-day Saint involvement in a “Mormon War” that occurred during this time. In addition, it discusses the events of Zion’s Camp, the Kirtland Camp, and the Saints’ exodus from Missouri to Quincy, Illinois.

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Staff Spotlight

Editorial Board Member

Victor Walch, after practicing law for over thirty-five years in Los Angeles and Pasadena, California, is now living in Wilsonville, Oregon. He and his wife, Carole, have nine children and thirty-three grandchildren. His interests include Church and community service, as well as teaching. He has written for the University of Southern California Tax Institute, Prentice-Hall, and the Religious Educator.

RSC Staff Member

Stephanie Wilson is the production manager in the Religious Studies Center. Her responsibilities include coordinating bids for print services and enhancing the distribution and publicity of all RSC publications. She also updates the RSC Web site, http://religion.byu.edu/rsc_about.php. She and her husband, Matt, live in Springville, Utah. Her interests include reading, travel, and good entertainment (including BYU plays).

Student Editorial Intern

Lindsay Davidson is a senior from Aurora, Oregon, majoring in English language with minors in ballroom dance and editing. She has worked at the RSC for two and a half years, where she edits, indexes, and typesets. Lindsay recently interned in the Church History Department editing oral histories. She has been a member of the BYU Ballroom Dance Company for two years. Her husband, Devin Davidson, is majoring in biology and will attend dental school in 2008.
Submission Guidelines

The Religious Educator serves the needs and interests of those who study and teach the restored gospel of Jesus Christ on a regular basis. The distinct focuses are on teaching the gospel; publishing studies on scripture, doctrine, and Church history; and sharing outstanding devotional essays. The contributions to each issue are carefully reviewed and edited by experienced teachers, writers, and scholars. The beliefs of the respective authors are their own and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, or The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Complete author guidelines, including suitable topics, are provided at tre.byu.edu. All manuscripts should be submitted electronically to rsc@byu.edu. Hard-copy submissions are accepted but not encouraged. Send hard-copy submissions to the editorial office at the address listed below.

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Those manuscripts that meet all criteria and appear to fill current needs will be peer reviewed and will receive a friendly, but careful, review. Authors will then be notified of the decision about publication. This process generally takes four to six months, and publication will generally occur within a year after acceptance has been received.

If an article is accepted, authors will be notified and asked to provide photocopies of all source materials cited, arranged in order, numbered to coincide with endnotes, and highlighted to reflect the quotations or paraphrases. Photocopies of source material must include title page and source page with the quotations used highlighted.

Editorial Questions

For questions or comments, e-mail us at rsc@byu.edu or write to Religious Educator, 167 HGB, Provo, UT 84602-2701.
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