

# Joseph

## An Audiovisual History



**T**his month BYU Broadcasting and Religious Education bring viewers a new series that focuses on the life and works of the Prophet Joseph Smith. The six-part series, entitled *Joseph*, was produced by Michael Hunter, who explains that *Joseph's* executive producer, Susan Easton Black (pictured right), had wanted to do the series for some time, and that while BYU Broadcasting shared her enthusiasm, “the right people, equipment, and resources didn’t all come together until last year.” The outcome is that *Joseph* lands right in your living room just in time for the bicentennial celebration of the Prophet’s birth in 1805.

In preparation for the series, Black and co-executive producer Andrew C. Skinner, Dean of Religious Education, enlisted the help of BYU Church history and doctrine professors, including Alex Baugh, Randy Bott, and Dean Garrett. In all, over 30 scholars contributed their knowledge and perspectives to the

series, making *Joseph* a true learning opportunity. Many of the same scholars also contributed to the series’ companion book, which will be published by Deseret Book in September.

Hunter explained that, in addition to the series’ six, one-hour episodes, the book will enable viewers to “delve deeper into the different aspects of Joseph’s life.” He added, “In one of the early project planning meetings, we discussed the great scholarship that was going into the writing of the series by the religious education faculty. Susan was very interested in pursuing the publication of a book to expand the reach of the project.”

While Black had significant involvement with the series from the beginning, her role as the series’ host came as a surprise—especially to her. Hunter said, “As the production developed, I soon realized that there really was no one better to host the series.” Hunter was right. Black joined the BYU faculty in 1978 and has since served in several significant administrative positions, received the university’s highest honor for a professor, and written numerous books on Joseph Smith and the Restoration.

Hunter relates, “It took a bit of arm twisting, but I was finally able to convince Susan to host the series.” Black is admittedly camera shy and insists that most of her scholastic colleagues feel the same way about cameras, lights, and action. But her background and natural modesty bring a unique charm to the series.



She said of her experience as host, “I am thankful for the chance to tell people outside of the classroom that Joseph was a prophet of God. To be on site and let people see places they’ll never see in their lifetime—it’s one thing to teach in a classroom, but to teach where the events happened is incredible. There’s something about being on sacred ground; there’s a spirit about it.”

The series was also an opportunity for those who already have testimonies of the Prophet to further develop them. Hunter said, “Obviously, it has been a great experience to spend the last 18 months spending much of my time learning about the Prophet Joseph Smith. I have felt my personal testimony of the Prophet and his work grow as I’ve learned more of his life and visited the places where he lived. While the project is now completed, I feel that I have just started to learn about Joseph and am anxious to continue learning about his life, mission, and legacy. And I’m personally grateful that a number of key positions on the project were filled by students, who were not only able to learn a great deal about television production, but also gain tremendous insight into the life of the Prophet.”

Hunter added that rather than provide an exhaustive review of the Prophet’s life, the producers of *Joseph* set out to cover events that “have a lasting impact on members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints today, two centuries after the birth of Joseph Smith.” Certainly one of the series’ aims is to reaffirm testimonies of the Prophet and the importance of his work. Black said, “Hopefully viewers will take away an understanding that Joseph lived an incredible life. It’s a wonderful story that needs to be retold again and again.”

This month BYU Television brings you the first hour-long installment in the six-episode series. The episode entitled “I Had Seen a Vision” covers the early years of the Prophet’s life and culminates with heavenly visitations from the angel Moroni, Jesus Christ, and Heavenly Father. In the coming months, BYU Television viewers can look forward to five more episodes of *Joseph*. Future episodes cover the publication of the Book of Mormon, the organization of the Church, the construction of the Kirtland Temple, the saints’ trek and subsequent expulsion to Missouri, and Joseph’s murder and Carthage jail.



The series will be available on DVD and is being presented in high definition. Both the book and DVD will be available through Deseret Book as well as other LDS booksellers. Funding for *Joseph* was provided by Angel Partners.

—Nathan A. Mulholland is an English major from Wolcott, N.Y.

### WATCH IT ON BYU TELEVISION

I Had Seen a Vision

Sunday, Sept. 25, at 7 & 9PM

Wednesday, Sept. 28, at NOON