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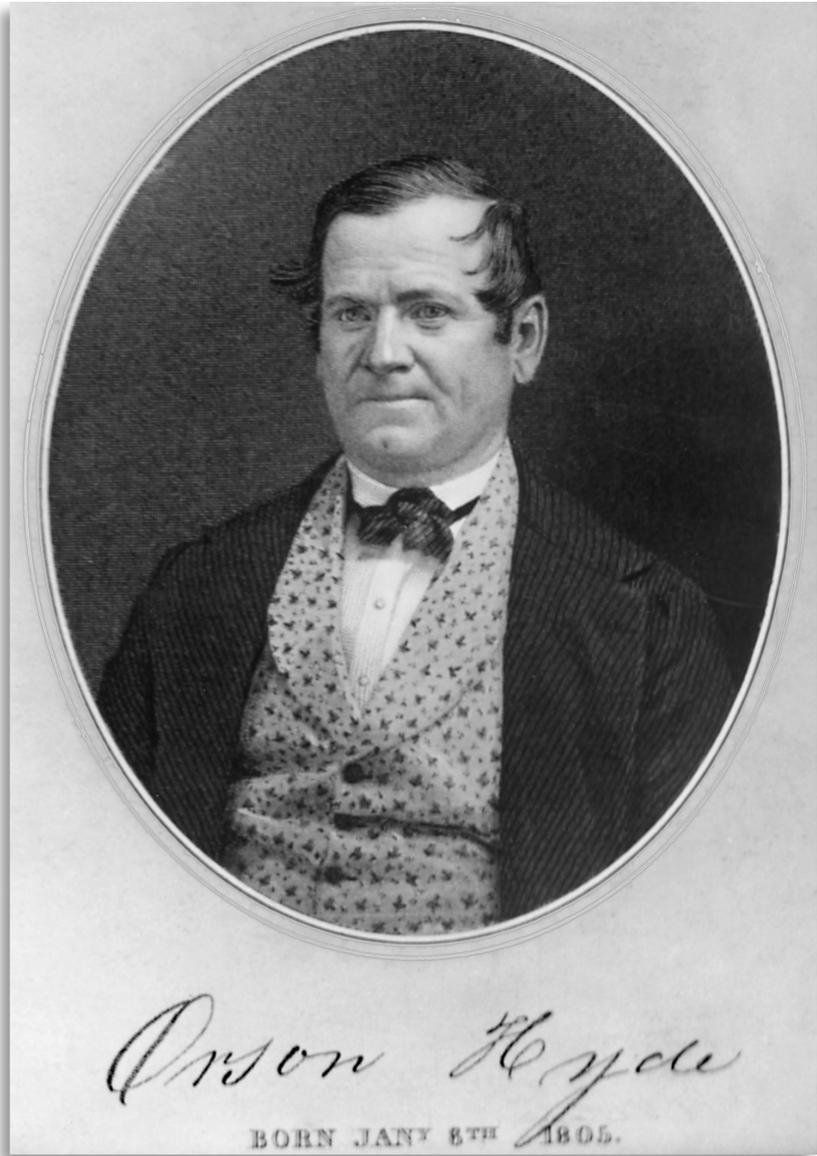


Illustration by Frederick H. Piercy, ca. 1853,
based on daguerrotype by Marsena Cannon, ca. 1850–52

Orson Hyde: A Life of Lessons Learned

Roy B. Huff

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The life of Orson Hyde is explained best with the backdrop of comparisons and contrasts. Though this man grew up an orphan, he would father thirty-three children. His lack of education in his youth compares with his idol and friend, the Prophet Joseph Smith, who was born the same year as Orson and who founded the School of the Prophets, which Orson would one day teach. In addition, both Orson and Joseph excelled at language learning, and both were involved with advanced Hebrew studies in Kirtland. Orson claimed that he had memorized the Bible in German, English, and Hebrew, quite an accomplishment for a man with almost no schooling in his youth. Another interesting connection between Joseph and Orson was their desire to unite with a religious society. They both were impressed by the Methodist faith, which Orson joined prior to his conversion to Mormonism and which Joseph felt inclined to join until the Lord instructed him otherwise.

It may seem rather ironic that Orson struggled twice with falling into apostasy himself but later remained steadfast and tried to counsel his mentor, Sidney Rigdon, who baptized Orson into the Church, when Sidney fell away from the Church following Joseph Smith's death. Orson also later rebaptized Oliver Cowdery, the man who called and ordained Orson as a member of the original Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. Twice Orson temporarily lost his standing in the Quorum of the Twelve, over which he would later preside for twenty-eight years. Orson Hyde's life is full of prophecies, miracles, and events that show his ability to overcome weaknesses and that play an integral role in key events in the dispensation of the fulness

of times.

Humble Beginnings

Orson Hyde was born in 1805 just a few months before the birth of the Prophet Joseph Smith. Although both were born to large and loving families in New England, Orson's life would take a few unexpected turns. Some were because of his own choices; others were attributed to circumstances beyond his control. The first was the death of his mother when he was only seven. At this age, Orson was placed in the care of Nathan Wheeler of nearby Derby, Connecticut. They were a good but strict family where Orson worked hard but received little education.

When Orson was twelve, his father drowned. After this tragedy, Orson felt as though he was treated like a hired hand and consequently struck out on his own, hoping to gain the education he desperately desired. His first line of work was in an iron foundry; there he learned to card wool before taking a position to work for Newel K. Whitney in his store in Kirtland. During this employment, he first came in contact with Mormonism. His first impressions were rather negative. After reading a portion of the Book of Mormon, he declared "that it was all fiction."¹ He even preached against the book several times before his conscience got the better of him and he concluded to meet the Prophet and investigate Mormonism firsthand. It was not long before he was convinced of the truth of the work, and in the fall of 1831, Orson Hyde was baptized by his friend and mentor, Sidney Rigdon.

Memorization of the Bible in Hebrew, German, and English

Immediately after his baptism, Orson responded to the call to perform his labors in the mission field. He served thirteen missions during his lifetime. The first two were with the Prophet Joseph Smith's brothers, Hyrum and Samuel. The second mission with Samuel took eleven months and covered thirteen hundred miles. They helped convert sixty souls into the Church between Kirtland, Ohio, and Waterboro, Maine. They often slept in barns and sheds and walked well into the night after being rejected along the way. Twice they miraculously escaped being tarred and feathered, and once they cast out evil spirits from a woman. The lessons Orson learned from his faithful companions and arduous labors during his first missions would be of great help for the longest mission he would undertake nine years later. In January of 1832, the Prophet

Joseph Smith gave Orson a blessing in which Joseph pronounced an unusual prophecy upon Orson's head: "In due time, thou shalt go to Jerusalem, the land of thy fathers, and be a watchman unto the house of Israel; and by thy hands, shall the Most High do a good work, which shall prepare the way, and greatly facilitate the gathering together of that people."²

The year 1833 was an eventful one in the life of Orson Hyde. He entered the School of the Prophets and was chosen to be the teacher of the school. He taught various subjects, including history, geology, geography, science, and government. He was also one of ten brethren who studied advanced Hebrew under the tutelage of Joshua Seixas in 1836. He later claimed, "I have once memorized the Bible, and when any one quoted one verse, I could quote the next. I have memorized it in English, German, and Hebrew."³ On several occasions, he spoke in tongues and, in March of that year, in the presence of many others, saw the Savior and concourses of angels. Orson was also called as a clerk for the First Presidency on 6 June 1833 and often knelt in prayer with them. He recorded many of the Kirtland revelations from 1831 to 1834, parts of the Book of Commandments, most of the Kirtland council minutes, and significant portions of Joseph Smith's letter book and patriarchal blessings.⁴ In the fall of 1833, the Prophet sent Orson to Jackson County, Missouri, to ascertain the situation of the Saints there and to inquire of the governor what he would do to assist the beleaguered Saints. In February 1834, Orson was appointed to the first high council of the Church.

Fed by an Angel

Later that same year, in response to the difficulties of the Saints in Independence, Missouri, the Lord called Orson to recruit volunteers and money for Zion's Camp and to relieve the debt the Church had in Kirtland. Discouraged and often going without meals during this mission in the eastern states, Orson walked an entire day on one occasion without anything to eat. He finally fell asleep and awoke amidst a sudden light and beheld an angel surrounded in glory. The angel handed him some fruit, the likes of which he had never before seen; it was more delicious than anything he had previously tasted. The angel also told him the blessings that awaited him, that he would have the gift of prophecy and that his words would be fulfilled.

Decades later, when a drought hit the area of Kaneshville, Iowa, over which Orson presided, he spoke to the Saints ravaged by the

famine, "Have I ever prophesied and it failed to come to pass?" The congregation enthusiastically responded, "No!" Orson then went on to say, "I prophesy in the name of Jehovah that we will have rain and our crops will be saved."⁵ The meeting was outside, and when the meeting began, the sky was clear. By the closing remarks, the rain began, and people scurried home for shelter. Soon the rain came in torrents, and people were amazed at the bounty of their harvest that season.

Orson accompanied the Prophet and others on Zion's Camp during the summer of 1834. The Prophet Joseph Smith remarked that Orson learned a lesson Joseph taught regarding the shooting of animals for waste. After criticizing the brethren for wanting to shoot snakes, the Prophet shot a squirrel and then walked away. Orson then picked up the squirrel and suggested they cook it so that nothing would be wasted.⁶ He was also entrusted with Parley P. Pratt to visit Missouri Governor Daniel Dunklin to see if he would fulfill his promise to reinstate the Saints to their rightful lands in Jackson County. This was Orson's second attempt to seek aid from the governor and the second time Governor Dunklin rebuffed him. When Zion's Camp returned to Kirtland, Orson was eager to get back to his sweetheart, Marinda Johnson. She was the daughter of John Johnson and sister to Luke and Lyman Johnson. They were married on 4 September 1834.

Orson's Call to the Twelve

The Lord seemed to have had great confidence in Orson's abilities. Already, he had been called on several missions, entrusted with special assignments with dignitaries, asked to be a clerk for the First Presidency, and given high-profile speaking assignments. Now the Lord would call him to serve with the first Apostles called in our dispensation. He was placed originally among the Twelve in the fourth position. Later, when the Prophet Joseph reordered the Twelve by their ages, Orson was placed fifth behind Thomas B. Marsh, David W. Patten, Brigham Young, and Heber C. Kimball. Two of Orson's brothers-in-law, Luke and Lyman Johnson, were also among his quorum. In the blessing that Oliver Cowdery gave Orson at the time of Orson's call to the Twelve, Oliver included some important insights and some unusual promises. He said, "He may stand on the earth and bring souls till Christ comes. We know that he loves Thee, O, Lord, and may this Thy servant be able to walk through pestilence and not be harmed; and the powers of darkness have no ascendancy over him; . . . may he be like one of the three

Nephites.”⁷

Within months, however, his standing in that quorum was placed in jeopardy because of a careless remark. While traveling with fellow Apostle William McLellin on a mission to Maine, Orson questioned Sidney Rigdon’s teaching abilities at the school in Kirtland. Elder McLellin included the offhand remark in a letter to his family, and it somehow was read by the leading brethren. Elder Pratt was disfellowshipped until he could make restitution, which he did readily when he returned to Kirtland.

Soon after the miraculous events that surrounded the Kirtland Temple dedication in which many saw angels and spoke in tongues, Elder Pratt was called to serve a mission to Canada. He met Elder Parley P. Pratt in Toronto, and they enjoyed much success together. When an irritable minister pressed for a debate with the missionaries, they reluctantly consented. Elder Pratt remarked that “an acre of people assembled” in a grove to listen to the two ministers speaking in allotted half-hour segments. The Presbyterian minister became increasingly flustered by the Apostle’s arguments and teachings from the Bible. He finally shouted, “Abominable! I have heard enough of such stuff.” Elder Hyde then remarked, “Gentlemen and ladies, . . . I should consider it highly dishonorable to continue to beat my antagonist after he had cried enough.” Immediately following the debate, Orson baptized forty people.⁸ There in Canada, he published a tract called “A Prophetic Warning,” which was the first missionary tract printed in the Church.⁹

The winter of 1836–37 was marked by speculation and greed among the Church members. Orson was not immune to this and was caught up with the way the Church’s store seemed to deal with the Twelve unequally. He wrote letters expressing his concerns to the Prophet Joseph, who spent time discussing these problems with Elder Pratt and easing his mind. Yet, in these troubled times, many leading brethren began to lose faith in the Prophet over his economic ventures and wanted him removed as prophet. Others accused the Prophet of attempted murder and even asked Orson to testify against Joseph. Orson’s testimony was used against Joseph, but the next day, feeling he was amiss, Orson came to apologize. As he entered the room, the Prophet was setting Heber C. Kimball apart as a missionary to open the country of England for missionary work. Orson’s heart melted, and he confessed his error and asked to accompany Heber on this historic mission. The Prophet complied, and Elder Pratt was set apart to accompany Elder Kimball.

The Mission to England

Elder Pratt's mission to England helped him come back to the strait and narrow path. It was as if the Lord did not want Elder Pratt to follow the darkened paths of so many of his brethren. The missionaries saw much success, as well as much opposition. The experiences literally changed the face of the Church because tens of thousands of Saints from the British Isles joined the Church and eventually immigrated to America and the Salt Lake Valley.

Meanwhile, the apostasy in Kirtland took its toll on the Church. "Between November 1837 and June 1838, possibly two or three hundred Kirtland Saints withdrew from the Church, representing from 10 to 15 percent of the membership there,"¹⁰ and the apostasy reached high up into the hierarchy of the Church. "The Three Witnesses, a member of the First Presidency, . . . four members of the Twelve Apostles, and several members of the First Quorum of the Seventy left the Church."¹¹ Yet the fresh stream of converts from England breathed new life into the Church for the next several decades. It is said that over a thousand Saints emigrated from England in 1841, with over ten thousand following the next decade. By 1870, twenty-eight thousand more came to the Salt Lake Valley, making the majority of the adult Saints in Utah natives of the British Isles.¹²

But things did not begin so easily for the missionaries. They were permitted to preach to James Fielding's congregation, but when many of his members applied for baptism, he did not allow them to use his hall anymore. He stated, "Kimball bored the holes, Goodson drove the nails, and Hyde clinched them."¹³ Some of James Fielding's members confessed that they had recently seen Elders Kimball and Hyde in visions coming to them to teach them the gospel. Other ministers tried to hinder their efforts, but interest grew; and they set a baptismal date for 30 July. The morning of that day brought an awful occurrence. One of the missionaries complained of being attacked by Satan and his host. Elders Kimball and Hyde tried to bless him, and Elder Kimball was knocked senseless to the floor. Their accounts of this experience are included in Myrtle Hyde's biography of Orson Hyde:

Orson's vision unveiled, and he saw the throng of awful attackers. They rushed at him with knives, threats, imprecations, and hellish grins, Orson's astonishment [was] extreme at the sinister appearance. These full-statured, bizarrely-clothed devils, men and women, possessed every form and feature of mortals, but

some had hideous distortions in face and body. They seemed infuriated, their words and actions expressing confusion and misery. The sight sickened Orson, but he stood between Heber and their venomous host. Summoning spiritual power, he eventually forced these fiends of hell to begin to retreat from the area of the room. As the last savage imp departed, he turned around and said, as if to appease Elder Hyde's strenuous opposition to them, "I never said anything against you!"

Orson replied, "It matters not to me whether you have or have not; you are a liar from the beginning! In the name of Jesus Christ, depart!"

Orson, Willard [Richards], and Isaac [Russell] turned their concerned attention to Heber, stretched out on the bed. They laid their hands on his head and, with priesthood authority, in the name of Jesus Christ, rebuked the influence of the evil spirits. Immediately Heber roused. Looking around, he began to get up.

In agonizing pain, drained of strength, Heber's body refused to stand, so he knelt, and he prayed. His energy beginning to return, he arose and sat on the bed with his companions, facing the room and fireplace. Before any significant discussion ensued, the veil withdrew from the eyes of all four missionaries, apparently that they would all know with surety the reality of the occupants of the realms of darkness. The space before them seemed to open up, and they watched the demoniac host advance toward them in legions, behind leaders, like armies surging to battle, the repulsive belligerents foaming and gnashing their teeth at the mortals. The evil horde pressed close—virulent and desperate, looks of vindictive malignity on their faces—within a few feet of the missionaries, making eye contact. In addition to human forms in this repulsive spectacle, Orson and the others saw snakes in both corners of the old fireplace, hissing, writhing, and crawling over each other, producing soul-racking effects on the observers.¹⁴

This scene lasted an hour and a half by Willard's watch. But despite being weakened and drenched with perspiration, the missionaries proceeded that morning to the River Ribble, where between seven and nine thousand people lined the river to witness the first baptisms in England.

This mission played a pivotal role in the life of Orson Hyde. He worked long hours, day after day, trying to meet the needs of the poor Saints in England, while being tutored by such a valiant Apostle in Elder Kimball. This friendship would prove instrumental in a scene two years later after Orson's apostasy from the Church. During the time of their mission in England, while confirming newly baptized

members, Orson was given an interesting experience. As Heber was blessing a certain individual, Orson saw in vision an angel recording the words Heber was speaking. Both missionaries rejoiced at this revelation.¹⁵ They also found on this mission that they shared many spiritual manifestations in common. They would often begin to relate a dream or vision they had, only to find out that the other had had the same experience.

Apostasy and Excommunication

The mission to England lasted a little over eleven months. On 21 May 1838, the missionaries arrived in Kirtland, Ohio. They found the Prophet had gone to Far West, Missouri, and the stalwart Saints had followed him there to new headquarters. Marinda's family became disgruntled and fell away from the Church, but she and Orson left with the Kimballs to go to Missouri. Once there, Orson fell sick. He was so sick on several occasions that he thought he would die. On 8 July, four new Apostles were chosen to fill the places left by the apostasy of Luke Johnson, William McLellin, John Boynton, and Lyman Johnson. The new Apostles were John Taylor, John E. Page, Wilford Woodruff, and Willard Richards. They were told that they would leave the following April from Far West to fulfill another mission to England. Willard Richards was still in England and would be set apart as an Apostle when the other members of the Twelve arrived there.

As the situation worsened among the Missouri mob, the militia, the apostates, and the Mormons, Orson's sicknesses continued to keep him mostly bedridden. He received a lot of attention from Thomas B. Marsh, the President of the Quorum of the Twelve, during his time of illness. Thomas's wife had had a run-in with Sister Harris, wife of George Washington Harris, over milk strip-pings, which estranged Thomas from the Brethren. He began to poison Orson with his skewed views, and when the mob violence reached a fevered pitch late in October, Thomas took his family and Orson's away from Far West to safety from the mobs. Still sick, Orson signed an affidavit alleging that Joseph sought the destruction of the Missourians and would tread their bodies like a modern Muhammad. This affidavit was signed by Orson on 24 October 1838, exactly three years before the day that he would ascend the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem and dedicate that land for the return of the Jews. Thus, one of his lowest points in his life happened on the same day as one of his highest points. Orson and his family moved with the Marsh family to southern Missouri to escape the violence

against the Saints. They testified against the Prophet, and their testimony was one of the main witnesses the prosecution used to have the Prophet Joseph and his companions thrown in jail and the Saints exiled from Missouri. Their affidavit reached Governor Lilburn W. Boggs, who used this evidence from two of the highest-ranking Church officials as proof of the Saints' aggressive acts.

In early November 1838, soon after the Battle of Crooked River, Orson and Thomas B. Marsh had a visitation that Orson wrote about decades later: "During our temptation, David W. Patten, was shot by the enemy, and several days afterwards, while Thos. B. and myself were sitting in a log cabin together in silent meditation, some being smote him on the shoulder, and said, with a countenance full of the deepest anxiety and solicitude, 'Thomas! Thomas! why have you so soon forgotten?' Thomas told me it was David W. Patten, with whom, he not long before, had made a covenant to remain true and faithful until the end."¹⁶

Thomas seemed to be unaffected by this messenger and remained outside the fellowship of the Church another nineteen years, but Orson had another experience not long after while he was teaching school in southern Missouri that affected his desire and motivation to return to the Church. The story is told by Allen Joseph Stout in his journal: "I saw a man walking behind me. I reined in the team to let him overtake me, and who should it be but Orson Hyde, who had apostatized in the fuss, but had seen a vision in which it was made known to him that if he did not make immediate restitution to the Quorum of the Twelve, he would be cut off and all his posterity, and that the curse of Cain . . . would be upon him."¹⁷

Orson got in touch with fellow Apostle Heber C. Kimball. He asked Heber if there was any hope for him to be forgiven by the Church. Elder Kimball told him there was hope and that Orson should quit his job teaching school and return to the Saints in Illinois. Orson asked if Heber would plead his case before the Brethren. Heber agreed to do so, and Hyrum Smith also pled for Orson's reinstatement. Elders Kimball and Hyde had shared multiple trials and experiences among the Saints in England and had a great love for one another. The Prophet Joseph Smith, having recently returned to the body of the Saints from nearly six months' imprisonment partly due to Orson's apostasy, was somewhat reluctant to restore Orson to his place among the Twelve. But upon listening to Heber and Hyrum's pleas, Joseph agreed to let Orson regain his position among the Twelve.

Two more side notes to Orson's return are interesting. Joseph asserted that the Lord told him "of Orson's approach, and [Joseph] had been watching out the window"¹⁸ and ran out to meet Orson upon his return to the Church. Also, while the Prophet Joseph was still in Liberty Jail, he sent to Brigham Young and the Twelve two people who would be chosen to replace the two apostatizing Apostles: George Albert Smith was called to replace Thomas B. Marsh, and Lyman Sherman was called to replace Orson Hyde. Joseph proposed the call of Brother Sherman to the position on 16 January 1839, and Brother Sherman passed away eleven days later on 27 January 1839 without ever knowing of the call. Elder Kimball took it as a sign that Elder Hyde was to remain in that quorum as the will of God.¹⁹ On another note, Orson was restored to his former place on 27 June 1839 in a meeting of the Twelve and the First Presidency.

Mission to the Holy Land

Orson settled his family in Nauvoo and almost immediately began to serve missions interspersed with sicknesses relating to malaria (what the Saints called ague), which most of the Saints and leaders suffered from during the early days of building the city "Beautiful" from the swamps along the Mississippi River. His fellow members of the Twelve fulfilled the prophecy that Joseph received in Far West that on 26 April 1839, they should begin their mission to England. Because of sickness, they finally left Nauvoo for England in the late summer of 1839. Orson's mind began to reflect on the aforementioned mission call in which he would go to Jerusalem to do a great work there. He began to allow the Spirit to work within him, and in early March 1840, Orson had another experience that helped formulate his resolve. After Marinda and the family fell asleep one night, Orson could not sleep as he considered his feelings in fulfilling his foreordained mission to the land of his forefathers, and for six hours he beheld a vision that outlined his mission to the Holy Land. He wrote that "the vision of the Lord, like clouds of light, burst into my view. . . . The cities of London, Amsterdam, Constantinople and Jerusalem, all appeared in succession before me."²⁰ The Spirit told Orson that these cities would be the field of his labors and that in these cities were many of the children of Abraham whom the Lord would gather to the land that He gave their fathers. Orson stated that, "In this time many things were shown unto me which I have never written; neither shall I write them until they are fulfilled in Jerusalem."²¹

Within six weeks of this vision, Orson embarked upon the longest missionary journey ever undertaken to that date by a missionary. He spent his time conversing with the Prophet Joseph and soliciting funds for his journey. He was assigned a companion to accompany him, the newly ordained Apostle John E. Page. They left Nauvoo on 15 April 1840. The Apostles had calculated that they would need a thousand dollars each for their trip to the Holy Land and back, so they tried to solicit funds from members on their trip. They thought it might take up to two years to reach their monetary goal. They separated from time to time for this purpose. While near Leechburg, Pennsylvania, Orson had a heavenly manifestation that he described as “the most remarkable phenomenon . . . in the heavens that I ever witnessed.” He further stated, “There appeared two bright and luminous bodies, one on the north and the other on the south of the sun; in length about ten yards, inclining to a circle resembling a rainbow, about fifty yards, distant from the sun; apparently east about twenty-five yards, was a body of light as brilliant almost as the sun itself; and on the west, a great distance from the sun, appeared a white semi-circle passing halfway round the horizon, and another crossing it at right angles, exhibiting a scene of the sublimest kind.”²²

Other passengers on the boat on which Orson was sailing at the time were privy to this scene, as many of them commented on it to each other. Orson felt that this was one of the signs of the times associated with his mission to the Holy Land and the gathering of the Jews. From Leechburg, Orson made his way to New York City. There he was to meet his fellow Apostle and companion. Elder Page delayed his coming, and this annoyed Orson. When the Prophet Joseph sent a stinging rebuke to the elders for delaying their mission, Orson felt justified in leaving behind his companion and continuing his journey toward Jerusalem. A sad note at this juncture is the fact that John E. Page faltered and left the Church soon after the Prophet Joseph’s and Hyrum’s martyrdom.

One final story of interest before Orson made his trip to England occurred in Philadelphia. He had requested funds from the Saints, and a stranger came forth with a bag of gold that he gave to Orson. He asked only that Orson remember him in his prayer that he would make in Jerusalem. Orson did not even know the donor’s name. It was not known outside the family until 1924, when the descendants of Joseph Ellison Beck claimed that he was the anonymous donor. Orson thought the money came from a wealthy Jew, and the funds amounted to about \$200, which was a small fortune at the time. Orson boarded a ship to England and arrived there in March 1841.

He was with his fellow Apostles at the April conference since nine of the Twelve were serving in England. Soon, seven of that number would return to Nauvoo and Orson would continue on his mission, leaving only Parley P. Pratt to remain in England to oversee the work there and help with the printing of Church materials.

Acquisition of German Language Skills in Eight Days

Orson made his way through the cities of London, England, and Rotterdam, Holland, where he tried to meet with the Jewish leaders in those cities. He then continued through Germany up the Rhine River. He was delayed with passport problems in Regensburg. This was at first quite frustrating for the Apostle, but he soon realized that it was quite a blessing in disguise. Orson loved to learn languages and felt that the German language was the dominant language in Europe. He believed that if he could learn that language, he could communicate with most Europeans. He wrote to the Prophet Joseph after two weeks in the country, saying that he found a lady who spoke French and German and wanted to learn English. They worked out an agreement where Orson would teach her English and she, in turn, would teach him German. After only eight days learning the language, he had “read one book through and part of another, and [had] translated and written considerable. I can speak and write considerable German already, and the lady tells me that I make astonishing progress.” He added, “The people will hardly believe but that I have spoken German before; but I tell them nein, (no).”²³ Orson attributed the ability to learn German so quickly to the Spirit of the Lord.

Orson then began to travel on the Danube River toward the Black Sea. He arrived at Constantinople as he had seen in his vision and after a few days continued toward Palestine. Another interesting heavenly manifestation occurred on 18 October 1841 after his ship left Beirut, Syria, for Jaffa, Palestine. Howard H. Barron, who wrote a biography on Elder Hyde, includes a remarkable vision that Elder Hyde had. While on the deck of the ship at one o'clock in the morning, all the passengers beheld “a very bright glittering sword appeared in the heavens, about two yards in length, with a beautiful hilt, as plain and complete as any cut you ever saw. And, what is still more remarkable, an arm, with a perfect hand, stretched itself out and took hold of the hilt of the sword.” The sight moved Orson enough to make his hair stand up and “the flesh, as it were, to crawl on my bones.” While all the Arabs on the ship thought the manifestation was from their Allah, Orson attributed it to his special blessing

to see the signs of the times and of Christ's second coming.²⁴

Elder Hyde also wrote a letter to fellow Apostle Parley P. Pratt in England about the difficulties of the last part of his voyage to the Holy Land. The trip from Smyrna, Turkey, to Beirut, Syria, normally took four days by boat. The crew packed seven days' worth of supplies to be safe. What they had not counted on was lack of sufficient wind to carry them on their journey. The trip lasted nineteen days. The passengers nearly starved to death, as reported in his letter: "A number of days I ate snails gathered from the rocks, while our vessel was becalmed in the midst of several small and uninhabited islands, but the greatest difficulty was, I could not get enough of them. I was so weak and exhausted that I could not go on shore after the slight exertion of drawing on my boots. But that is past; I am now strong and well and have plenty to eat."²⁵

Upon arriving in Palestine, Orson took up with a group of English gentlemen for the remaining thirty-five miles to Jerusalem. This group was heavily armed, which was necessary to combat the land pirates who lay in wait for travelers in the hill country near Jerusalem. They welcomed Orson because he could handle another weapon in their defense. Orson reached the top of the hill from Jaffa on 21 October 1841 and for the first time beheld the city that had preoccupied him for almost a decade and that he had traveled for nineteen months to reach. He remarked that Jerusalem was just as he had seen it in the vision. He burst forth with tears as he finally saw the object of his desire and considered all the events that had happened there throughout the history of the world. In the next couple of days, he met with other Christian missionaries, but they had little interest in Orson's mission, so he decided to fulfill his purpose for being there.

Dedication of the Holy Land for the Return of the Jews

In the letter Elder Hyde wrote to Elder Pratt, Orson said, "I have only time to say that I have seen Jerusalem precisely according to the vision which I had. I saw no one with me in the vision; and although Elder Page was appointed to accompany me there, yet I found myself there alone."²⁶ Orson then related what happened the day he dedicated the land for the return of the Jews:

"On Sunday morning, October 24, a good while before day, I arose from sleep, and went out of the city as soon as the gates were opened, crossed the brook Kedron, and went upon the Mount of Olives, and there, in solemn silence, with pen, ink, and paper, just as I saw in the vision, offered up the following prayer to Him

who lives forever and ever.”²⁷ Elder Hyde then wrote the prayer he delivered on the Mount of Olives as he looked to the Temple Mount where Solomon’s and Herod’s temples stood. He included in his prayer a blessing on the land to remove the barrenness of the land and to bless the nations of the world to help the Jews return to their homeland. He also asked a blessing on his family and on the Presidency of the Church. He even asked a blessing on all those who aided him on his journey: “Particularly do Thou bless the stranger in Philadelphia, whom I never saw, but who sent me gold, with a request that I should pray for him in Jerusalem. Now, O Lord, let blessings come upon him from an unexpected quarter, and let his basket be filled, and his storehouse abound with plenty, and let not the good things of the earth be his only portion, but let him be found among those to whom it shall be said, ‘Thou hast been faithful over a few things and I will make thee ruler over many.’”²⁸

The gentleman previously mentioned as Joseph Ellison Beck was the stranger in Philadelphia who gave the money to Orson. True to his word, Orson blessed this man and his family. Years later, a descendant of Joseph Beck named John F. Beck commented that he was a witness that Elder Hyde’s blessing on his father was fulfilled in every particular. Joseph Beck had fourteen children, and they never wanted for material things. Brother Beck remarked that he knew of no apostates among his family.²⁹

It is interesting that Elder Hyde did not bless the land for missionary work. He blessed it for the return of the Jewish nation. He blessed the nations that would help the Jews return. His prayer was given in 1841 when there were only seven thousand Jews in Jerusalem by his estimate. Elder Hyde then erected a pile of stones on the Mount of Olives as a witness of this event, “according to ancient custom.”³⁰ Later that day, he erected another altar of stones on the Temple Mount.

After finishing the main purpose of his trip, Elder Hyde left the Holy Land for Egypt, went to Italy, and then traveled back through Germany on his way home. In Regensburg, he wrote a pamphlet entitled *A Cry from the Wilderness*, which included an account of the Prophet’s First Vision and the rise of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. This became the first foreign language account of the First Vision. He remained in Germany for seven months to complete his treatise. He then traveled back through England before taking passage back to America and up the Mississippi to Nauvoo. Notably, a group of men plotted to take Orson’s life while he was on a steamer traveling up the Mississippi. A Church member overheard

their plans and informed Elder Hyde, who spoke with the ship's captain, who took precautions to protect the Apostle.³¹

He arrived back in Nauvoo on 7 December 1842, having been away from his family for 967 days and traveling over twenty thousand miles. To that point, this was the longest missionary journey of any Apostle ever recorded. He was grateful to be home, although he had no house. He was thankful to find out that the Prophet Joseph received a revelation in behalf of Orson's wife, Marinda, counseling the Ebenezer Robinson family to take care of the Hydes in Orson's absence. Orson saw the date of the revelation, which was only weeks after Orson prayed on the Mount of Olives that his family would be taken care of.³² Having been gone for so long and having very little means, Orson solicited funds for the building of a house in Nauvoo. He was not very successful until the Prophet Joseph intervened and told the Saints they should assist the Apostle in obtaining money to build a house.

Orson's Subsequent Growth in the Twelve

Elder Hyde's faithfulness, as well as the faith the Brethren placed in Orson's abilities, became evident upon his return from his mission to the Holy Land. He was elected as a Nauvoo city councilman in February 1843. He was called on a mission to St. Petersburg, Russia, in June 1843. (Orson never completed this mission.) He was asked by the Prophet Joseph Smith to take a petition to Congress and the president of the United States in December 1843. After the Martyrdom, he was left in charge of Nauvoo and the temple when the other leaders embarked on their journey with the Saints across the plains. He was also called with fellow Apostle John Taylor to return to England and put in order the Church there that began to suffer from poor leadership. Later, he was left in charge of Kanessville, Iowa, while the other members of his quorum traveled on to the valley of the Great Salt Lake. Even later, he was charged with taking care of settlements at Fort Supply, in Wyoming, settling Carson Valley in Nevada, and, finally, presiding over the Sanpete-Sevier district in south-central Utah.

Elder Hyde learned the important lesson of receiving counsel. On 2 April 1843 in Ramus, Illinois, he commented on the coming of the Lord who would be riding on a white horse as a warrior. He commented also that it was the privilege of the Saints to have the Father and the Son dwell in their hearts. At dinner, the Prophet said he would like to offer some corrections to Elder Hyde's remarks

that morning, to which Elder Hyde replied, “They shall be thankfully received.”³³ The Prophet spent the day with Orson, publicly and privately, teaching him the wonderful truths of the gospel because Orson was humble enough and prepared enough to receive them. Most of the revelation given in Doctrine and Covenants 130 was given in those meetings. That evening, after the Prophet had finished his sermon, he told the congregation that Brother Hyde would speak for three-quarters of an hour, “otherwise I would give him a good whipping.”³⁴

Along the same lines of receiving counsel, Elder Hyde learned the difficult lesson of remaining true to his testimony of the restored gospel. After the Martyrdom, when Sidney Rigdon claimed to be the guardian of the Church, the Twelve commissioned Elder Hyde to try to bring Sidney back into the true fold. This man was once Elder Hyde’s mentor. Sidney allowed Orson to stay in his home while he began preaching the Reformed Baptist faith that Sidney espoused. Sidney had even baptized Orson into the Mormon faith. Now, over twelve years later, the roles were switched as Orson tried to reason with Sidney and help him come to realize what Orson knew to be true. Four years later, while Orson was presiding over the Saints in Kaneshville, Oliver Cowdery sought for rebaptism into the Church. This was the man who called, ordained, and commissioned Orson Hyde in his duties as a newly called Apostle. Once again the roles were reversed.

Like other members of the Twelve, Elder Hyde had an extraordinary experience upon the death of the Prophet Joseph Smith and his brother Hyrum. Upon learning of the deaths of the prophets, Elder Hyde lay on a couch with a newspaper over his face. He then sensed hands pressing on his face through the newspaper. With his spiritual eyes, he perceived the Prophet Joseph Smith and Hyrum giving him a blessing, standing over him majestic and peaceful.³⁵ At this, Elder Hyde knew the Prophet and his brother were with the Lord and felt no more disposition to worry about the plight of the Saints’ ability to succeed without their beloved Prophet.

Elder Hyde experienced another test as a member of the Quorum of the Twelve. In December 1847, upon President Young’s return in Kaneshville from the initial trip to the Salt Lake Valley, the Twelve Apostles met in Orson’s home for counsel. The Lord spoke to them, and Orson then submitted Brigham Young’s name to preside over the Church and to organize the First Presidency. Three and a half years had passed since the Prophet Joseph Smith’s death, and the Twelve, under the direction of President Young, had

led the Church since that time. At the next general conference in April 1848, Orson Hyde was chosen to preside over the Quorum of the Twelve. He held that position for twenty-eight years, serving longer than any other man in our dispensation. Two years before Brigham Young's death in 1875, President Young reordered the seniority among the Twelve to reflect their entry into that quorum at the time of each member's ordination or reinstatement. In the case of Elder Hyde, John Taylor and Wilford Woodruff were placed ahead of him in the quorum, and thus John Taylor became the President of the Quorum of the Twelve, and, in August 1877, President of the Church. If the reordering of the Twelve had not occurred, Orson Hyde would have become the next President of the Church. Susan Easton Black wrote, "If Orson felt any disappointment or resentment at the change, it is not recorded."³⁶ Orson died on Thanksgiving day, 28 November 1878, in Spring City, Utah, in full fellowship.

Thus ended the life of a great Apostle, colonizer, and missionary. Orson grew up in very humble circumstances. He overcame weaknesses to become a powerful orator and leader and staunch defendant of the Prophet Joseph Smith and of Mormonism. Indeed, his was a life of lessons learned, from which we can each take comfort that we too can overcome great obstacles to being faithful to the kingdom and make a lasting impression in our own field of labors.

Notes

1. Marvin S. Hill, "An Historical Study of the Life of Orson Hyde, Early Mormon Missionary and Apostle from 1805–1852" (master's thesis, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah, 1955), 9.

2. Myrtle Stevens Hyde, *Orson Hyde: The Olive Branch of Israel* (Salt Lake City: Agreka Books, 2000), 23.

3. Orson Hyde, in *Journal of Discourses* (London: Latter-day Saints' Book Depot, 1854–86), 2:81–82.

4. Susan Easton Black, *Who's Who in the Doctrine and Covenants* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1997), 142.

5. Hyde, *Olive Branch*, 254–55.

6. Joseph Smith, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 2d ed., rev. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1974), 2:72.

7. Smith, *History of the Church*, 189–90.

8. Hyde, *Olive Branch*, 72–73.

9. Hyde, *Olive Branch*, 73.

10. Milton V. Backman Jr., *The Heavens Resound: A History of the Latter-day Saints in Ohio, 1830–1838* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1983), 328.

11. *Church History in the Fulness of Times* (Salt Lake City: The Church of