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BYU Jerusalem Center Timeline

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BYU Jerusalem Center Timeline

- April 6, 1840 Joseph Smith calls Orson Hyde and John E. Page on a mission to the Holy Land. For reasons that are not entirely clear, Elder Page returns to Nauvoo and, as a consequence, Elder Hyde travels to Palestine alone.
- October 24, 1841 Elder Hyde ascends the Mount of Olives and offers a prayer dedicating the Holy Land for the gathering of the Jews.
- March 2, 1873 President George A. Smith and Elders Lorenzo Snow and Albert Carrington ascend the Mount of Olives and rededicate the Holy Land for the gathering of the Jews.
- 1886 President John Taylor directs that Jacob Spori, then serving in the Swiss German Mission, travel to Haifa to preach to the German-speaking Templars who had established colonies in the Holy Land. On August 29, 1886, Spori baptizes Johan Georg Grau and, later, his wife Magdalena, who anchor the Church in Haifa for many years.
- May 8, 1898 Elder Anthon H. Lund rededicates the Holy Land.
- March 4, 1902 Elder Francis M. Lyman dedicates the land again on the Mount of Olives and at the Casa Nova Hostel in the Old City, and later (March 16) on Mount Carmel.
- November 3, 1921 During a world tour, Elder David O. McKay visits Jerusalem and offers a sacred prayer on the Mount

- of Olives. (Elder McKay does not use dedicatory language in his prayer.)
- October 18, 1927 Elder James E. Talmage rededicates the Holy Land on Mount Carmel.
- 1931-1932 Sidney B. Sperry does postdoctoral work at the American School of Oriental Research in Jerusalem following the completion of a PhD at the University of Chicago. Sperry is the first Latter-day Saint scholar to live and study in the Holy Land.
- May 21, 1933 Elder John A. Widtsoe rededicates the Holy Land from Mount Carmel and, ten days later, from the Mount of Olives.
- 1959 Robert C. Taylor is appointed director of BYU Travel Study.
- 1966 Daniel H. Ludlow proposes a study-abroad program in Jerusalem under the auspices of BYU Travel Study.
- February 2, 1966 President David O. McKay approves a BYU study-abroad program in the Holy Land with a proviso that studies be equally divided between Arab and Israeli histories, cultures, religions, and languages to make it clear to students, faculty, and others that BYU's student programs in the Holy Land will be impartial and focused on both groups.
- June 1967 The Six-Day War leads to Israel's occupation of East Jerusalem, the West Bank, Gaza, the Golan Heights, and the Sinai. Within a year, Israel expropriates vacant land in East Jerusalem and the Israel Lands Authority comes into possession of the land on which the Center will be built.
- January 27, 1968 Dan Ludlow leads the first group of twenty BYU students to the Holy Land. A "traveling branch" of the Church is organized.
- 1969 Members living in the Holy Land are organized into a branch under the direction of the Swiss Mission (later renamed the Switzerland Mission).
- 1969 BYU's student programs in the Holy Land are suspended during Israel's War of Attrition.

- 1970 BYU Travel Study initiates nonstudent tours of the Holy Land.
- September 1971 President Hugh B. Brown visits the Holy Land and speaks of his visit in general conference the next month.
- October 1971 President N. Eldon Tanner visits the Holy Land, but his visit is cut short by the death of Elder Richard L. Evans.
- January 1972 BYU's student programs in the Holy Land resume. The students are among the first groups to cross the Allenby Bridge from Jordan. They move into the City Hotel in East Jerusalem.
- April 1972 President Tanner makes a second visit to the Holy Land accompanied by Elder Franklin D. Richards. Robert Taylor proposes the construction of a building as a place for members of the Church to worship and to house BYU's student programs but is told, "Not now."
- September 1972 President Harold B. Lee and Elder Gordon B. Hinckley visit Jerusalem and organize the Jerusalem Branch. In a visit with the Chief Rabbi, they are asked whether the Church intends to proselytize in the Holy Land. President Lee responds that the Church does not come through the back door, but only when invited through the front door. David Galbraith proposes the creation of a memorial to Orson Hyde in Jerusalem. President Lee authorizes Galbraith to look for land for that purpose.
- November 20, 1972 The First Presidency grants permission for the branches in the Holy Land to observe the Sabbath on Saturday. They also grant permission for a translation of the Book of Mormon into Hebrew. (In 1973, an Israeli, Jonathan Shunary, is selected to undertake the translation.)
- October 12, 1973 BYU's student program in the Holy Land is cut short at the onset of the Yom Kippur War and students are moved to Salzburg, Austria, to finish their program.
- Early summer 1974 BYU's student programs in the Holy Land resume.

- 1974 Jerusalem Mayor Teddy Kollek approaches David Galbraith to ascertain Church interest in acquiring a five-and-one-half-acre parcel of land that had become available on the Mount of Olives, landscaping it, and then donating it to Jerusalem to be a city park named in honor of Orson Hyde. The Church chooses not to be directly involved, but a Utah LLC, The Orson Hyde Foundation, is created for the purpose of raising money to purchase the land and donate it to the Jerusalem Foundation.
- 1977 The Israel District is organized (later renamed the Jerusalem District).
- January 1977 Ivan and Minnie Barrett are called to be special representatives of the Church in the Holy Land. They, and their successors (Jerusalem Center service couples), provide public affairs, humanitarian and education outreach, medical support, and support for Church branches and the Jerusalem District while living in different places in Israel and, mostly, at the Jerusalem Center.
- April 1978 BYU's student programs in the Holy Land move to Kibbutz Ramat Rachel.
- April 10, 1979 The First Presidency calls Elder Howard W. Hunter to pursue a "Jerusalem Center" project to be a Church presence in Jerusalem and a facility to house BYU's student programs in the Holy Land.
- October 20, 1979 Elder Hunter, in the company of President Spencer W. Kimball, formally announces the desire to construct a Center if suitable land can be found. President Kimball and Elder Hunter unveil a concept model of the Center to a large group of Latter-day Saints on a cruise ship traveling to the Holy Land for the dedication of the Orson Hyde Memorial Garden.
- October 24, 1979 The Orson Hyde Memorial Garden is dedicated by President Kimball. In his dedicatory prayer, President Kimball prays for the welfare of all of Abraham's children. President Kimball selects the site where the Center now sits. President Tanner

- calls for a vote to sustain the choice, which is unanimous in the affirmative.
- March 25, 1980 Robert Thorn is assigned by the First Presidency to be the on-site coordinator of the Jerusalem Center project and to negotiate with the government of Israel to secure the selected site. Arthur Nielsen, a Salt Lake City attorney, is assigned to represent the Church on-site on legal matters associated with the land acquisition.
- March 1981 The Israel Lands Authority provisionally approves leasing the site to the Church for the construction of the Jerusalem Center. This is but the first of many needed approvals as the Lands Authority's provisional approval wends its way through national and Jerusalem Municipality bureaucracies over the next three years.
- April 1981 Elder James E. Faust is assigned to assist Elder Hunter with the Jerusalem Center project. David B. Galbraith is appointed the director of the Center.
- April 2, 1984 Robert Thorn and Arthur Nielsen complete negotiations for the site and a five-year development lease is signed.
- May 22, 1984 Fred Schwendiman and Robert Smith, both former BYU vice presidents, are assigned to provide on-site supervision of the construction of the Center.
- August 21, 1984 Construction of the Center begins under the direction of Israeli construction engineer, Eleazar Rahat, with Israeli David Resnick and American Frank Ferguson as architects.
- December 20, 1985 President Ezra Taft Benson writes to Mayor Teddy Kollek assuring him that the Church and BYU will abide by commitments not to proselytize in Israel, commitments first made in a letter to Kollek from BYU President Jeffrey R. Holland on August 1, 1985.
- January 1986 BYU Study Abroad programs, not including the Jerusalem Center's student programs in the Holy

- land, are transferred from Continuing Education to the Kennedy Center.
- May 8, 1986 A letter signed by 154 members of Congress is sent to 120 Knesset members, the prime minister of Israel, selected senior government ministers, and civil servants and is published in local newspapers, encouraging the government to accept the non-proselytizing assurances from BYU and the Church as made in good faith and binding.
- September 1, 1986 Robert Taylor is made a special assistant to the president for the Jerusalem Center, and BYU's student programs in the Holy Land are separated from Travel Study and Continuing Education.
- March 4, 1987 The Jerusalem Municipality issues occupancy permits for the completed part of the Center.
- March 8, 1987 Eighty BYU study-abroad students move into the Center from Kibbutz Ramat Rachel.
- May 18, 1988 The lease for the land on which the Center had been constructed is signed. The lease extends for forty-nine years with an option to extend another forty-nine years.
- May 16, 1989 The Jerusalem Center is dedicated in a private ceremony. President Thomas S. Monson conducts, with Elders Boyd K. Packer and Jeffrey R. Holland in attendance. President Howard W. Hunter gives the dedicatory prayer.
- June 1989 James R. Kearl is appointed as an assistant to the university president with administrative oversight responsibilities for the Jerusalem Center. (Kearl had been appointed to a similar position by President Holland in February 1989, but with President Holland's call to the Seventy in April 1989, the assignment had been set aside pending the appointment of a new BYU president.)
- January 1991 The Center's student program in the Holy Land is suspended for one semester at the onset of the Gulf War.

- January 1993 The Tabernacle Choir performs in the Holy Land and broadcasts its Sunday morning programming from the Center's upper auditorium.
- September 15, 1998 Guests are invited to a lighting ceremony as the Center joins in a citywide program to illuminate the exterior façade of structures of historical and architectural significance, including the Church of All Nations, the Church of the Ascension, the Augusta Victoria Tower, and the walls of the Old City.
- November 2000 The Center's students return early because of security concerns with the onset of the Second Intifada.
- 2002 BYU-affiliated expatriate administrators return to the United States. Eran Hayet and Tawfic Alawi are asked to manage the Center's limited nonstudent activities until the Center's student programs can resume.
- August 31, 2004 BYU Travel Study is closed and nonstudent BYU-sponsored tours of the Holy Land end.
- December 2006 Eran Hayet is appointed as the executive director of the Center, with Tawfic Alawi as one associate director and a rotating BYU-affiliated expatriate as a second associate director.
- January 2007 The Center's student programs resume but at half capacity (84 students instead of 170 students in each program).
- April 14, 2018 President Russell M. Nelson and his wife, and Elder Jeffery R. Holland and his wife visit the Center as their second destination on a worldwide tour to cities in Europe, Africa, Asia, and the Hawaiian Islands.
- March 2020 The Center's students return to the U.S. early because of the Covid-19 pandemic.
- May 2020 The Center's student programs are suspended until at least May 2021 because of the pandemic. All service couples and expatriate faculty and administrators return to the U.S.