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The Restored Church of Jesus Christ and the Holy Land: Beginnings

David M. Whitchurch

It is a privilege to be with you as we celebrate the thirtieth anniversary of the dedication of the Jerusalem Center and the impact it has made on the lives of so many students, faculty, administrators, members of the Church from around the world, and those who currently reside in the Holy Land. A heartfelt welcome to all.

The Jerusalem Center and the events leading to its completion and dedication in 1989 may best be summed up by a response given by Elder Jeffrey R. Holland during an interview with a well-known Utah news anchor. When asked about the acquisition of property and construction of the Center, Elder Holland said, “It was nothing short of a miracle. It was a miracle!”¹ Seeing that this conference revolves around Jerusalem, a land of miracles, Elder Holland’s statement seems apropos for much of my own presentation.

My assignment is to share *in brief* the “beginnings” of the Church and its involvement in the sacred land where our Savior lived, died, and was resurrected. While the majority of this presentation will focus on Orson Hyde, the first portion of it is devoted to shedding light on Joseph Smith and his prophetically motivated influences on Hyde’s mission and the gathering of dispersed Israel.

Joseph Smith and the Gathering of Israel

Joseph Smith received inklings of his role in the gathering of scattered Israel as early as 1823. Throughout a nightlong visit, the angel Moroni

1. Jeffrey R. Holland, interview with Carol Mikita, KSL Broadcast, “Jerusalem: Link to the Past, Hope of the Future,” video, 44:48, April 5, 2014, accessed at <https://www.ksl.com/article/29327073/jerusalem-link-to-the-past-hope-of-the-future>.

repeatedly told the seventeen-year-old Smith “that God had a work for [him] to do” (JS–H 1:33). In addition to speaking about the location, retrieval, and means of translating an ancient record, Moroni instructed the young prophet on various matters from the Old Testament (JS–H 1:36–39). Two of the passages cited, one from Isaiah and the other from Joel, alerted Smith to an imminent latter-day gathering of dispersed Israel. The prophet Isaiah declared, “And it shall come to pass in that day, that the Lord shall set his hand again the second time to recover the remnant of his people. . . . And he shall set up an ensign for the nations, and shall assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth” (Isa. 11:11–12).

After Moroni finished citing this passage, he informed Smith “it was about to be fulfilled” (JS–H 1:40). Soon thereafter, he quoted from Joel: “And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be delivered: for in mount Zion and in Jerusalem shall be deliverance, as the Lord hath said, and in the remnant whom the Lord shall call” (Joel 2:32).

Moroni told the Prophet “that this was not yet fulfilled, but was soon to be” (JS–H 1:41). Smith informs us that after the angelic visitor concluded his message, he ascended into heaven, leaving Smith alone and in the dark to meditate on what had just happened. Almost immediately after departing, Moroni reappeared. In total, Moroni came to Smith three times that night in rapid succession, plus once again after sunrise. With each appearance, he repeated the same message without variation (JS–H 1:43–49).

Later that day, after Smith went to where the plates were deposited, Moroni appeared once again, prevented Smith from touching the records, and arranged to meet him on the same date and at the same place for the next four years. During their annual “interviews,” Smith “received instruction and intelligence . . . , respecting what the Lord was going to do, and how and in what manner his kingdom was to be conducted in the last days” (JS–H 1:54). The Prophet’s knowledge about the Lord’s plan to gather scattered Israel was extensive, even before he began translating the plates. Once he received the plates and translation was underway, Smith encountered numerous prophetic teachings about covenantal promises that God made to ancient Israel.² One such

2. A sampling of Book of Mormon references about the house of Israel can be found in the following: 1 Nephi 10:14; 19:16; 21:12–14, 18; 22:12; 2 Nephi 9:2; 21:11–12; 30:7; Jacob 6:1–4; 3 Nephi 5:24; 16:5; 20:13, 25, 29; 21:24; and Ether 13:4–11.

example can be seen from the following statement made by the resurrected Savior: “And I will remember the covenant which I have made with my people; and I have covenanted with them that I would gather them together in mine own due time, that I would give unto them again the land of their fathers for their inheritance, which is the land of Jerusalem, which is the promised land unto them forever, saith the Father” (3 Ne. 20:29).

In addition to Smith’s experience translating the Book of Mormon, the Lord furthered the Prophet’s understanding of a latter-day restoration of Israel through other means. From the very beginning of the Restoration, Joseph Smith sought and received direction from the Lord on a variety of topics. Many of these involved redeeming ancient Israel.³ For instance, at the 1836 dedication of the Kirtland Temple, Joseph prayed, “We therefore ask thee to have mercy upon the children of Jacob, that Jerusalem, from this hour, may begin to be redeemed; and the yoke of bondage may begin to be broken off from the house of David; and the children of Judah may begin to return to the lands which thou didst give to Abraham, their father (D&C 109:62–64).”⁴

Additionally, Smith received knowledge about the latter-day gathering as he followed the Lord’s directives to make inspired revisions to the Bible. Of particular significance is what he learned about his own role in the latter-day gathering as he “translated” the latter portion of the book of Genesis.⁵

3. Each of the following revelations deal with the “gathering” of dispersed Israel. The year Joseph Smith received each revelation has been included to impress upon the reader how much Joseph Smith knew about the gathering of Israel before Hyde’s call to Jerusalem. D&C 10:59–65 (received 1829); D&C 29:7 (received 1830); D&C 39:11 (received 1831); D&C 42:9 (received 1831); D&C 43:24 (received 1831); D&C 45:25 (received 1831); D&C 68:1 (received 1831); D&C 77:14 (received 1832); D&C 90:2–4 (received 1833); D&C 101:13 (received 1833); D&C 109:61–67 (received 1836); D&C 110:11 (received 1836); D&C 133:14 (received 1831); Moses 7:62 (received 1830); and Joseph Smith–Matthew 1:27 (translated 1831).

4. Joseph Smith continued to talk about Jerusalem after Orson Hyde dedicated the Holy Land. During a conference in 1843, the Prophet said that “Jerusalem—must be rebuilt. Judah . . . must return . . . before—[the] Son of Man will make his appence [appearance].” “Journal, December 1842–June 1844; Book 2, 10 March 1843–14 July 1843,” 75, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed October 4, 2019, <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/journal-december-1842-june-1844-book-2-10-march-1843-14-july-1843/83>. The details about how these prophetic pronouncements will ultimately be fulfilled have yet to be revealed.

5. The original work Smith did on the Bible was known as the New Translation. To avoid confusion with the *Inspired Version*, a publication by the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ, the name was changed in the 1970s to the *Joseph Smith Translation*. For

And again, a seer [referring to Joseph Smith] will I raise up out of the fruit of thy loins [referring to Joseph of Egypt], and unto him will I give power to bring forth my word unto the seed of thy loins; and not to the bringing forth of my word only, saith the Lord, but to the convincing them of my word, which shall have already gone forth among them in the last days; wherefore the fruit of thy loins shall write, and the fruit of the loins of Judah shall write; and that which shall be written by the fruit of thy loins, and also that which shall be written by the fruit of the loins of Judah, shall grow together unto the confounding of false doctrines, and laying down of contentions, and establishing peace among the fruit of thy loins, and bringing them to a knowledge of their fathers in the latter days; and also to the knowledge of my covenants, saith the Lord.⁶

In sum, Joseph Smith learned through various means from the *very beginning* that the latter-day restoration mandated both a spiritual awakening and a geographic gathering of dispersed Israel.

Orson Hyde and His Mission to the Holy Land

This month (October 2019) marks 178 years since Orson Hyde, an Apostle of the Lord, awoke before dawn in the Old City of Jerusalem. He walked from the Latin Convent, where he had lodged for the previous three nights, and made his way to Stephen's Gate, one of only four city gates in use in 1841.⁷ As soon as the gate was opened, he "crossed the brook Cedron, and went upon the Mount of Olives, and there, in solemn silence, with pen, ink, and paper, just as [he had seen] in the vision," offered a "prayer to him who lives for ever and ever."⁸ Elder Hyde's mission to the Holy Land is both remarkable and miraculous, considering his humble beginnings.

additional information about the history of the New Translation, see Scott H. Faulring, Kent P. Jackson, and Robert J. Matthews, eds., *Joseph Smith's New Translation of the Bible: Original Manuscripts* (Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2004), 3.

6. Joseph Smith Translation, Genesis 50:30–31. More detail about Joseph Smith's role in the latter-day gathering can be found by reading Joseph Smith Translation, Genesis 50:24–35.

7. Stephen's Gate is also known as the "Gate of the Tribes" or "Gate of my Lady Mary." Edward Robinson, *Biblical Researches in Palestine, Mount Sinai, and Arabia Petraea: A Journal of Travels in the Year 1838*, vol. 1 (London: John Murray, 1841), 386.

8. Orson Hyde to Parley P. Pratt, Alexandria, Egypt, November 22, 1841, in *Times and Seasons* 3, no. 11 (April 1, 1842): 739.

Hyde's story begins in Oxford, New Haven, Connecticut. He was born on January 8, 1805, the same year as Joseph Smith. After the death of his mother, the seven-year-old Orson was placed under the care of a neighbor.⁹ When he was fourteen, his neighbor took him and moved from Connecticut to the Western Reserve near Kirtland, Ohio. Later, while working at the N. K. Whitney and Co. store in Kirtland, Hyde decided to carefully read the Book of Mormon to determine its truth. After three months of study, he was baptized by Sidney Rigdon on October 30, 1831. Three days after his baptism, Hyde, now age twenty-six, received a powerful confirmation while working at the store: "The Spirit of the Lord came upon me in so powerful a manner, that I felt like waiting upon no one, and withdrew in private to enjoy the feast alone. This to me, was a precious season, long to be remembered."¹⁰

A new member of the Church and eager to know the Lord's will, Hyde sought direction from the Prophet. In a blessing given in 1832, he was told, "Thou shalt go to Jerusalem . . . 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."¹¹ Shortly before this, in November 1831, Joseph Smith had received the following revelation: "My servant, Orson Hyde, was called by his ordination to proclaim the everlasting gospel, by the Spirit of the living God, from people to people, and from land to land, in the congregations of the wicked, in their synagogues, reasoning with and expounding all scriptures unto them" (D&C 68:1).

9. The farmer's name was Nathan Wheeler. Orson provides little information about Wheeler other than that the Wheeler family was "good" but "penurious." "History of Brigham Young," *Latter-day Saints Millennial Star* 26, no. 47 (November 19, 1864): 742.

10. "History of Brigham Young," *Millennial Star* 26, no. 48 (November 26, 1864): 761.

11. Orson Hyde to Joseph Smith, June 15, 1841, London, England, published in *Times and Seasons* 2, no. 23 (October 1, 1841): 553, accessed October 9, 2020, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/letter-from-orson-hyde-15june-1841/3>. In this letter, Hyde also reported the progress of his travels en route to Jerusalem and included, as part of his letter, a copy of another letter he had written to Solomon Hirschell, the Chief Rabbi of England (1802–1842), in which Hyde stated, "About nine years ago, a young man with whom I had had a short acquaintance, and one, too, in whom dwelt much wisdom and knowledge—in whose bosom the Almighty had deposited many secrets, laid his hand upon my head, and pronounced these remarkable words." Orson Hyde to Joseph Smith, June 15, 1841, 552. While the letter does not mention Smith by name, from the description it seems likely that he is referring to Joseph Smith Jr.

Completely immersed in the latter-day work,¹² Hyde was called in 1835 to serve in the newly organized Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. During Hyde's ordination, Oliver Cowdery, in the presence of Joseph Smith, pronounced that "he [Hyde] shall be made mighty and be endued with power from on high, and go forth to the nations of the earth . . . , both to Jew & Gentile and . . . to all nations, kingdoms and tongues."¹³

Five years later, in early March 1840, Hyde learned from the Lord of his upcoming mission to the Holy Land. Before falling asleep one night, he started thinking about "the field of [his] future labors." As he did, a vision was opened before him. For the next six hours, he did not close his eyes as he saw, among other things, "the cities of London, Amsterdam, Constantinople and Jerusalem." In the vision, Hyde was commanded to go to the cities he was shown.¹⁴ Less than a month later, on April 6, he attended general conference in Commerce (Nauvoo), Illinois. During his address, he spoke of the vision he had received a few weeks previously. From the conference minutes, we learn that

Elder Orson Hyde addressed the conference at some length, and stated that it had been prophesied, some years ago, that he had a great work to perform among the Jews; and that he had recently been moved upon by the Spirit of the Lord to visit that people, and gather up all the information he could, respecting their movements, expectations &c, and communicate the same to this Church, and to the nation at large, stating that he intended to visit the Jews in New York, London, and Amsterdam and then visit Constantinople and the Holy Land.¹⁵

After Elder Hyde sat down, Joseph Smith stood and

on motion, resolved that Elder Orson Hyde proceed on his mission to the Jews and that letters of recommendation be given him signed by the President and Clerk of the Conference. Elder John E. Page, also a member of the Twelve, then rose, and spoke with much force on the subject

12. By 1835, Hyde had completed four proselyting missions: Orange, Cuyahoga County, Ohio (1831); the eastern United States (1832); Jackson County, Missouri (1833); and Pennsylvania and New York (1834). See "Hyde, Orson: Biography," Joseph Smith Papers, accessed January 24, 2020, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/person/orson-hyde>.

13. "Blessing to Orson Hyde, 15 February 1835," 151, Joseph Smith Papers, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/blessing-to-orson-hyde-15-february-1835/1>.

14. Orson Hyde to Joseph Smith, June 15, 1841, 553.

15. "History, 1838-1856, Volume C-1 [2 November 1838-31 July 1842]," 1043, Joseph Smith Papers, accessed January 23, 2020, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-c-1-2-november-1838-31-july-1842/215>. The Conference was held in Commerce (Nauvoo), Hancock County, Illinois.

of Elder Hyde's mission, the gathering of the Jews, and restoration of the house of Israel, proving in a short but convincing manner from the Bible, Book of Mormon and the Book of Doctrine and Covenants that these things must take place, and that the time had nearly arrived for their accomplishment.¹⁶

Two days later, on the last day of the conference, Joseph Smith proposed "that since Elder Hyde had been appointed to visit the Jews he had felt an impression that it would be well for Elder John E. Page to accompany him on his mission. It was resolved that Elder John E. Page be appointed to accompany Elder Orson Hyde on his mission and that he have proper credentials given him."¹⁷

In the next edition of the *Times and Seasons*, Joseph Smith published the particulars of their call to serve:

Be it known that we the constituted authorities of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, assembled in conference, . . . considering an important event at hand, an event involving the interest and fate of the Gentile nations throughout the world. From the signs of the times, and from declarations contained in the oracles of God, we are forced to come to this conclusion.

- The Jewish nation have been scattered abroad among the Gentiles for a long period; and in our estimation, the time of the commencement of their return to the Holy land, has already arrived.

- As this scattered and persecuted people are set among the Gentiles as a sign unto them of the second coming of the Messiah [*sic*] . . . : It is highly important, in our opinion, that the present views and movements of the Jewish people be sought after, and laid before the American people for their consideration, their [profit], and their learning; and feeling it to be our duty to employ the most efficient means in our power to save the children of men from the "abomination that maketh desolate."—We have, by the counsel of the Holy Spirit, appointed Elder Orson Hyde, the bearer of these presents, a faithful and worthy minister of Jesus Christ, to be our agent and representative in foreign lands, to visit the cities of London, Amsterdam, Constantinople and Jerusalem; and also other places that he may deem expedient, and converse with the priests, rulers and Elders of the Jews, and obtain from them all the information possible, and communicate the same to some principal paper for publication, that it may have a general circulation throughout the United States.

16. "History, 1838–1856, Volume C-1," 1043.

17. "History, 1838–1856, Volume C-1," 1046.

- As Mr. Hyde has willingly and cheerfully accepted the appointment to become our servant, and the servant of the public in distant and foreign countries for Christs' sake, we do confidently recommend him to all religious and christian people, and to gentlemen and ladies, making no profession, as a worthy member of society, possessing much zeal to promote the happiness of mankind, fully believing that they will be forward to render him all the pecuniary aid he needs, to accomplish this laborious and hazardous mission for the general good of the human family. Ministers of every denomination, upon whom Mr. H. shall call, are requested to hold up his hands and aid him by their influence, with an assurance that such as do this, shall have the prayers and blessings of a poor and an afflicted people whose blood has flowed to test the depths of their sincerity, and to crimson the face of freedoms soil with MARTYR'S BLOOD.

- Mr. Hyde is instructed by this conference to transmit to this country nothing but simple facts for publication, entirely disconnected with any peculiar views of theology, leaving each class to make their own comments and draw their own inferences.¹⁸

On Wednesday, April 15, 1840, one week after the conference concluded, Hyde and Page departed from Nauvoo on their mission to Jerusalem.¹⁹ For the next ten months, they traveled in the United States, sometimes together and sometimes apart. Their intended purposes were to bolster the Saints along the way and to raise funds for their journey to Jerusalem. Achieving these aims prolonged their travels. In a letter written in late September, Hyde reported to Joseph Smith: "I left Elder Page at Cincinnati the latter part of August, and came on up the Ohio River. . . . I shall return to Philadelphia in a few days where I expect to meet brother Page, and then, if the Lord will, after holding a few meetings in this country, we shall proceed on to New York, there take ship and sail over the seas. We were in hopes of sailing earlier: but it has been impossible to get away from the people any sooner."²⁰

Although Hyde expressed a desire to expedite his departure to England, five more months would pass before he boarded a ship for Liverpool. Having returned from a mission to the British Isles a few years earlier, Hyde

18. "Recommendation for Orson Hyde, 6 April 1840," 86–87, Joseph Smith Papers, accessed January 23, 2020, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/recommendation-for-orson-hyde-6-april-1840/1>, bullet points added for readability.

19. Orson Hyde to Joseph Smith and Bro. Robinson, April 28, 1840, Quincy, Illinois, in *Times and Seasons* 1, no. 8 (June 1840): 116.

20. Orson Hyde to the Brethren, September 28, 1840, Burlington County, N.J., in *Times and Seasons* 2, no. 1 (November 1, 1840): 104–5.

knew of the abject poverty many of the Saints faced in England. In a letter to Joseph Smith, he wrote, “It is very hard times in England—Thousands have nothing to do, and are literally starving.”²¹ He also knew that once he arrived in Europe, member support would be nonexistent.²² Hyde knew that the best chance of funding their mission was before they left the United States for Great Britain.

Of great significance, then, was a large sum of money he received while in Philadelphia. As Hyde neared the end of giving a public sermon, he told his listeners about his mission to dedicate Jerusalem for the gathering of the Jews and the need for financial assistance. A man in the audience responded to his petition by returning home to get a purse of gold. He then sent his son to give the money to Hyde with a special request that Hyde pray for him when he arrived in Jerusalem.²³ Hyde followed through on the man’s request, as can be seen in this portion of his prayer offered on the Mount of Olives: “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.’”²⁴

21. Orson Hyde to Joseph Smith, June 15, 1841, in “History, 1838–1856, Volume C-1,” 1212, accessed January 20, 2020, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-c-1-2-november-1838-31-july-1842/384>.

22. The following provides the establishment of the Church in the European countries Hyde traveled: Netherlands (1861), Germany (1851), Austria (1883), Hungary (1885), Slovakia (1939), Romania (1899). See “Facts and Statistics,” The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, accessed January 24, 2020, <https://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/facts-and-statistics/country>.

23. The name of the “stranger” who supplied the gold, Joseph Ellison Beck, remained unknown until 1924. He and his wife were not members of the Church at the time they donated the money. Both would later be baptized and immigrate with his family to Utah. See Mary Afton Beck Healey, *Joseph Ellison Beck: Ancestry and Progeny through the Son Taylor Beck, 1810–1922* (self-published family history, n.d.), 3, copy in possession of author.

24. “History, 1838–1856, Volume C-1,” 1252.

The extremely generous donation given to Hyde may also explain how Hyde afforded the extra time spent in Germany to prepare and publish the first German language missionary tract. Hyde referred to the 115-page pamphlet as “a snug little article on every point of doctrine, believed by the Saints.” The tract was titled *Ein Ruf aus der Wüste, eine Stimme aus dem Schoose der Erde: Kurzer Ueberblick des Ursprungs und der Lehre*

Hyde finally arrived in New York City sometime in late November or early December 1840, where he would wait for Page.²⁵ By mid-January 1841, still anticipating his mission companion's arrival, Hyde read in the *Times and Seasons* a notice from the First Presidency: "Elders Orson Hyde and John E. Page are informed, that the Lord is not well pleased with them in consequence of their delaying their mission, (Elder John E. Page in particular,) and they are requested by the First Presidency to hasten their journey towards their destination."²⁶

Worried how best to respond, Hyde wrote a letter to Joseph Smith asking whether he should leave New York alone. Rather than wait for a response, he decided to book passage to Liverpool, England, hoping Page might catch up to him there. He departed New York on February 13, 1841, on the ship *United States*.²⁷ Hyde wrote another letter to Joseph Smith from Manchester with an explanation of his actions:

der Kirche "Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints" in Amerika (A Cry out of the Wilderness: A Voice from the Bowels of the Earth: A Short Summary of the Origin and Teaching of the Church [of] "Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints" in America), Frankfurt, Germany, 1842, 115 pages. See "Orson Hyde, *Ein Ruf aus der Wüste (A Cry out of the Wilderness)*, 1842, extract, English translation," Joseph Smith Papers, accessed October 1, 2020, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/orson-hyde-ein-ruf-aus-der-wuste-a-cry-out-of-the-wilderness-1842-extract-english-translation/1#source-note>.

25. Hyde explains in Orson Hyde to Joseph Smith, June 15, 1841, 552–53, why he left New York without waiting for Page. His letter of explanation is important for several reasons: (1) it recounts an exchange that occurred between himself and Solomon Hirschell, the Chief Rabbi of England; (2) it is from this letter we learn that in 1831 Joseph Smith told Hyde he would travel to Jerusalem and "be a watchman unto the house of Israel"; and (3) Hyde shares previously unknown details about his six-hour vision in which he saw himself traveling to Jerusalem. See *Journal History of the Church: 1840–1849, 1841*, September 1, 1841 (images 191–97) and June 15, 1841 (images 135–38), Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, accessed October 1, 2020, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets?id=2285a7c4-f5e3-4559-9bb5-4be6524033c1&crate=o&index=0>.

26. *Times and Seasons* 2, no. 6 (January 15, 1841): 287.

27. Hyde's decision to depart when he did can be explained in two ways: (1) he was anxious to respond to the First Presidency's mandate to "hasten their journey towards their destination," and (2) with limited transatlantic crossings available, timing was crucial. Sailing ships took an average of thirty-two days to cross. Missing a scheduled departure would have been costly. See the description under "Painting, Garrick," National Museum of American History, accessed January 14, 2020, https://americanhistory.si.edu/collections/search/object/nmah_1301989, for passage times between Liverpool and New York. Elder Page wrote Joseph Smith from Philadelphia six months after Hyde had departed to explain why he did not go with Hyde. In his letter, he told the Prophet that he had insufficient funds to travel to Jerusalem. In June of 1841, George A. Smith, also a member of the Twelve, reported to Joseph Smith that he had met with Page in

In my last to you, from New York, I requested you to write me a letter about the propriety of going on without Elder Page and direct it to Manchester in this country. But I feel perfectly justified at present in doing as I have; and I calculate to hasten on, just as soon as the brethren sail for America. Yet I should be extremely glad to hear from you at any time, and shall be happy to abide by your advice and counsel. But if I hear nothing from you to the contrary, I shall if the Lord will, hasten on as fast as possible without him. I have been greeted with a hearty welcome in this country by the saints where we were acquainted, I do assure you.²⁸

As seen in his vision years earlier, Hyde would now proceed unaccompanied to London, Amsterdam, Constantinople, and Jerusalem.

Hyde continued to demonstrate the same tenacious commitment to complete his mission as he had done since leaving Nauvoo; however, now alone and still far from Jerusalem, he seemed to sense the full weight of what was ahead. He eloquently expressed his gratitude to the Prophet for buoying him up during these challenging times. In a letter from Bavaria,²⁹ he wrote, “The friendship and good-will which are breathed towards me through all your letters, are received as the legacy which noble minds and generous hearts are ever anxious to bequeath. They soften the hard and rugged path in which Heaven has directed my course. They are buoyancy in depression,—joy in sorrow; and when the dark clouds of desponding hope are gathering thick around the mental horizon, like kind angels from the fountain of mercy, they dispel the gloom, dry the tear of sorrow, and pour humanity’s healing balm into my grieved and sorrowful heart.”³⁰

Philadelphia and advised him to catch up to Hyde in England. Elder G. A. Smith offered to assist Page in every way possible, but Page rejected his offer. “Elder Smith subsequently learned that Elder Page had sufficient money, without collections to have taken him through to England.” See Orson Hyde to Joseph Smith, June 15, 1841, 552–53; *Journal History of the Church: 1840–1849, 1841*.

28. Orson Hyde to Joseph Smith, April 17, 1841, Manchester, England, in *Times and Seasons* 2, no. 18 (July 15, 1841): 482–83.

29. Hyde wrote this letter in July 1841 from Ratisbon (Regensburg), Bavaria, a city on the Danube River. See “Letter from Orson Hyde, 17 July 1841,” 570–73, Joseph Smith Papers, accessed January 23, 2020, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/letter-from-orson-hyde-17july-1841/1>. Hyde spent a total of ten months in Ratisbon, two months on his way to Jerusalem, and eight months after he returned. Most of his time there was spent learning German, translating into German a previously written English document and arranging for it to be published. See note 24 above.

30. “Letter from Orson Hyde, 17 July 1841,” 572.

In addition to these emotional hardships, Hyde faced physically demanding trials as he traveled in the regions governed by the Ottoman Empire. For example, when sailing from Smyrna (modern-day Izmir, Turkey) to Beirut, he wrote, “We only took in stores for one week, thinking that would surely be sufficient, as the voyage is usually made in four days.”³¹ A delay resulted from lack of wind that becalmed his ship, extending a relatively short voyage to nineteen days. Famished, Hyde resorted to eating snails gathered from the rocks, “but the greatest difficulty was,” he said, “I could not get enough of them.” When the ship finally ported at Beirut, he found that in his weakened condition he did not have the strength to get up and “go on shore after the slight exertion of drawing on [his] boots.”³² He also learned firsthand the reality of recent fighting taking place between Egyptian and Syrian forces.³³ One report stated that eight hundred people had recently been killed not far from Beirut, and the general turmoil at that time had left much of Lebanon in shambles.³⁴

Orson Hyde arrived in Jaffa on Tuesday, October 20, 1841. After stopping at the American consulate to get a letter of recommendation

31. Orson Hyde to Parley P. Pratt, October 20, 1841, Jaffa, Palestine, in *A Voice from Jerusalem, or a Sketch of the Travels and Ministry of Elder Orson Hyde, Missionary of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, to Germany, Constantinople, and Jerusalem* (Liverpool: P. P. Pratt, 1842), 34, accessed October 9, 2020, <https://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/digital/collection/NCMP1820-1846/id/2587>.

32. Hyde to Pratt, October 20, 1841, 34. In a letter to Parley P. Pratt, Hyde would write again about part of the journey: “The Lord knows that I have had a hard time, and suffered much. . . . The heat is most oppressive, and has been all through Syria. I have not time to tell you how many days I have been at sea, without food, or how many snails I have eaten; but if I had had plenty of them, I should have done very well.” Orson Hyde to Parley P. Pratt, November 22, 1841, Alexandria, Egypt, in *Times and Seasons* 3, no. 11 (April 1, 1842): 739.

33. The Second Egyptian-Ottoman War was fought from 1839 to 1841, when the Ottoman Empire, supported by Britain, Austria, and Russia, moved to reclaim Lebanon from Egyptian forces under the leadership of Mohamed Ali’s general Ibrahim Pasha.

34. Hyde recounted the state of lawlessness, murder, theft, and political difficulties in and around Beirut while stranded on a ship during a twenty-eight-day quarantine at Trieste, Italy. “Syria at present is in a very unsettled state. The Drewzes [Druze] and Catholics are fighting almost constantly. They sometimes kill hundreds and hundreds of a day. In some sections it is not infrequent that the traveller meets some dozen or twenty men by the way-side without heads, in a day. In a letter from Bavaria, I stated that hostilities had re-commenced between the Turks and Egyptians; I took the statement from a German paper, but it was a mistake. The hostilities were between the lesser tribes in Syria.” Orson Hyde to the Twelve, January 1, 1842, Trieste, Italy, in *Times and Seasons* 3, no. 18 (July 15, 1842): 852.

from the local consul, he happened on a company of English gentlemen with “many” armed guards, who offered to let Hyde travel with them to Jerusalem at little to no cost.³⁵ It was a welcome gesture. He hurriedly wrote a letter to Parley P. Pratt, editor of the *Millennial Star*, to report his progress: “I have only time to say a few words; but through the favor of heaven I am well and in good spirits, and expect, in a day or two, to see Jerusalem.”³⁶ The forty-five-mile overland trek from Jaffa to Jerusalem took Hyde and his company two days. Hyde eloquently described his first impressions of seeing Jerusalem in a separate letter to Parley P. Pratt written a few months later from Trieste, Italy:

Since it has pleased the Lord to grant unto me health and prosperity—to protect me from the dangers of the climates—from the plague and pestilence that have carried death and mourning on their wing, and return me again in safety to a land of civilized life, these things demand my highest gratitude, as well as demonstrations of praise and thanksgiving, to His exalted name.

As a member, therefore, of your honorable quorum, bearing, in common with you, the responsibility under which Heaven has laid us, to spread the word of life among the perishing nations of the earth, allow me to say, that, on the 21st of October last, “my natural eyes, for the first time beheld” Jerusalem; and as I gazed upon it and its environs, the mountains and hills by which it is surrounded, and considered, that this is the stage upon which so many scenes of wonders have been acted, where prophets were stoned, and the Saviour of sinners slain, a storm of commingled emotions suddenly arose in my breast, the force of which was only spent in a profuse shower of tears.³⁷

Hyde entered the Old City of Jerusalem through Jaffa gate. He then sought the assistance of an American missionary by the name of George Backus Whiting, a well-seasoned missionary who had been working in the region for many years. Whiting and Charles Seldon Sherman were employed by the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions to work with and bring Jews to Christ.³⁸ Whiting took Hyde to

35. This happenstance meeting saved Hyde a considerable amount of money, since the route between Jaffa and Jerusalem was extremely dangerous. See Hyde to Pratt, October 20, 1841, 33.

36. Hyde to Pratt, October 20, 1841, 33.

37. Hyde to the Twelve, January 1, 1842, 841.

38. Whiting and Sherman were in Jerusalem on assignment from the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (A.B.C.F.M.). Between 1810 and 1870 its membership consisted of Reformed Christian traditions such as Presbyterians,



View of Jerusalem from level 7. Photograph by Sigal Kolton. Courtesy BYU Jerusalem Center.



Nineteenth-century Jerusalem from near the later location of the Jerusalem Center. Courtesy Library of Congress.

the Latin Convent (Terra Santa) and reported, “And there engaged for me my board and lodging at a reasonable compensation, and said that he would keep a little watch to see that I was well taken care of. This expression of kindness did not escape my notice.”³⁹ Within a matter of hours, Sherman and Charles Alonzo Gager, a missionary friend of Sherman visiting from Connecticut, stopped by the Latin Convent to see Hyde. “After some considerable conversation upon the state of affairs in general, in America,” wrote Hyde, “I introduced to them the subject of my mission to that place; and observed, that I had undertaken to do a good work in the name of the Lord, and had come there for a righteous purpose, and wished their co-operation and friendly aid. They assured me that they should be happy to render me any assistance in their power to do good.”⁴⁰

Exhausted from his travels and from the extreme heat inundating the region, Hyde requested that they meet at another time so that he could rest. It appears from his letters that he spent a good part of the next day, Friday, at the Latin Convent working on a document that he could share with the American missionaries. His object in doing so was to clearly tell them his purpose in coming to Jerusalem. The meeting took place on Saturday, October 23, at Whiting’s home.⁴¹

After the usual salutations were past, and all quietly seated, I expressed to them my gratitude for that opportunity of bearing testimony to the glorious reality, that the Lord was about to visit his people, and also my gratitude to him whose hand had been stretched out for my safety and protection, and also to bear me onward to the place where mercy, with all her celestial charms, was embodied in the person of his own Son.

I then took the liberty of reading the document containing the object of my mission there, and were it not for its length I would here insert it. After it was read, all sat in private meditation until Mr. Gager interrupted the silence by asking wherein the doctrines of our church differed from the doctrines of the established orthodox churches.⁴²

In recently located documentation, Gager described his impressions of the same meeting:

Congregationalists, and German Reformed churches. Their primary outreach included numerous non-Christianized countries and American Indian groups.

39. Hyde to the Twelve, January 1, 1842, 841.

40. Hyde to the Twelve, January 1, 1842, 841.

41. Whiting had recently moved to a new home located just inside Jaffa Gate.

42. Hyde to the Twelve, January 1, 1842, 848.

Sat 23rd [October 1841] Called at Br Whiting's and there had an interview with Mr Hyde a Mormonite from Illinois, who has come out to Jerusalem by special commission from God to smite the earth and rebuke the curse of this afflicted land. . . .

He is a man of simplicity and has every appearance of being sincere. He believes in their power to work miracles if faithful to God. Adheres as do all their preachers to the directions given by our Lord when sending out his 12 disciples accepts all the canons of scripture and some new revelations.⁴³

The next morning, Sunday, Orson Hyde arose early to fulfill the long-awaited mission that had brought him to the Holy Land. He prayed (in part),

O Thou! who art from everlasting to everlasting, eternally and unchangeably the same, even the God who rules in the heavens above, and controls the destinies of men on the earth, wilt Thou not condescend, through thine infinite goodness and royal favour, to listen to the prayer of thy servant which he this day offers up unto thee in the name of thy holy child Jesus, upon this land where the Sun of Righteousness sat in blood, and thine *Anointed One* expired. . . .

Now, O Lord! thy servant has been obedient to the heavenly vision which thou gavest him in his native land; and under the shadow of thine outstretched arm, he has safely arrived in this place to dedicate and consecrate this land unto Thee, for the gathering together of Judah's scattered remnants, according to the predictions of the holy prophets. Everlasting thanks be ascribed unto thee, O Father! Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast preserved thy servant from the dangers of the seas, and from the plague and pestilence which have caused the land to mourn.—The violence of man has also been restrained, and thy providential care by night and by day has been exercised over thine unworthy servant. Accept, therefore, O Lord, the tribute of a grateful heart for all past favours, and be pleased to continue thy kindness and mercy towards a needy worm of the dust. . . .

Grant, therefore, O Lord, in the name of thy well-beloved Son, Jesus Christ, to remove the barrenness and sterility of this land, and let springs of living water break forth to water its thirsty soil. Let the vine and the olive produce in their strength, and the fig tree bloom and flourish. . . .

43. Charles A. Gager: *Travels: Journal of Travel to Canary Islands, Spain, Jerusalem, with Commonplace Book and Notes, 1836–1842*. The entire Gager letter is forthcoming in a future publication.



Orson Hyde Dedicates the Promised Land, by Clark Kelley Price. Courtesy the artist.

Let a peculiar blessing rest upon the presidency of thy Church, for at them are the arrows of the enemy directed. . . . Also the quorum of the Twelve, do thou be pleased to stand by, for thou knowest the obstacles which we have to encounter, the temptations to which we are exposed, and the privations which we must suffer. Give us, therefore, strength according to our day, and help us to bear a faithful testimony of Jesus and his gospel, and to finish with fidelity and honour the work which thou hast given us to do, and then give us a place in thy glorious kingdom. And let this blessing rest upon every faithful officer and member in thy Church. And all the glory and honour will we ascribe unto God and the Lamb for ever and ever.

Amen.⁴⁴

44. Orson Hyde to Parley P. Pratt, November 22, 1841, Alexandria, in *Times and Seasons* 3, no. 11 (April 1, 1842): 739–41.

Having pronounced this dedication, Hyde left the city around noon the following day. After his long and arduous journey, the time Hyde actually spent in Jerusalem was remarkably brief: he first saw Jerusalem on a Thursday (October 21, 1841), met with Protestant missionaries (Whiting, Sherman, and Gager) on Saturday, dedicated the Holy Land on the Mount of Olives on Sunday, and departed Jerusalem to begin his journey home on Monday.

On leaving, Hyde traveled in company with Gager, who was returning to his home in Norwich, Connecticut. En route, Gager took ill with typhus. Hyde reported, “I waited and tended upon him as well as our circumstances would allow; and when we landed at Bulack [Bulaq/Boulaq, Egypt], I got four men to take him to the American consul’s, in Cairo, on a litter; I also took all his baggage there, and assisted in putting him upon a good bed—employed a good faithful Arabian nurse, and the English doctor.”⁴⁵ Gager died within hours of their arrival at the hospital.⁴⁶

Hyde continued traveling to Trieste, Italy, by way of Alexandria, Egypt, then over the Alps and back to Regensburg, Bavaria. He was determined to publish the story of the Restoration in German.⁴⁷ In a letter to his wife, Marinda, he explained,

I feel quite anxious to get our faith and principles in print in the German language; but what the effect will be, time must determine. The Catholic religion in Germany is fortified by long and deep rooted prejudices; and to a certain extent by laws of human enactment. I have dreamed that they shut me up in prison: but if they do, I shall not have the honor of being the first Latter-Day Saint, who for the truth’s sake, has been imprisoned. . . . I feel glad, and more than glad that I have seen Jerusalem. Face never answered more correctly to face in water, than Mt. Olivet did to the vision I had in Nauvoo. . . .

May the Lord bless you all, and save you from the violence of men, and from all evil. My kind respects to the Presidency, and to all that enquire after me. I am as ever your affectionate husband.⁴⁸

More than a year passed before Elder Hyde returned to his family in December 1842. He arrived in the middle of winter, having walked the

45. Hyde to Pratt, November 22, 1841, 739.

46. Hyde to Pratt, November 22, 1841, 739.

47. Hyde to Pratt, November 22, 1841, 741.

48. Orson Hyde to Marinda Hyde, December 21, 1841, Trieste, Italy, in *Times and Seasons* 3, no. 13 (May 2, 1842): 777.

one hundred and eighty-five miles from St. Louis to Nauvoo to greet his wife and two young daughters.⁴⁹ In fulfilling his mission to the Holy Land, he had traveled just under twenty thousand miles and was gone for thirty-two months.⁵⁰

Jerusalem and the Restored Church, 1842–1984: A Brief Review

More than three decades passed before any other Church leaders would visit the Holy Land. However, between 1873 and 1933, eight presiding authorities of the Church traveled to Jerusalem as members of either the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles or the First Presidency: Albert Carington, Lorenzo Snow, George A. Smith, Anthon H. Lund, Francis M. Lyman, David O. McKay, James E. Talmage, and John A. Widtsoe.⁵¹ All went with the same purpose as that of Elder Hyde: to offer up special prayers for the gathering of scattered Israel.

Their visits, of course, would not be the end of it. The number of Latter-day Saints traveling to the Middle East grew dramatically after Elder Spencer W. Kimball visited the Holy Land in 1960.⁵² At the April 1961 general conference, Kimball devoted his entire talk to telling the Saints about his trip to the Holy Land.⁵³ Within a couple of years, BYU's Department of Travel Study sought authorization from the Board of Trustees to begin a program in Jerusalem. The matter was referred to the First Presidency. President David O. McKay approved the request with

49. He arrived on December 8, 1842. The ship he had taken from Liverpool ported in St. Louis because of too much ice on the Mississippi River.

50. Estimating how far Hyde travelled is difficult at best. Whenever possible, he took advantage of water routes. The meandering course of rivers adds considerably to the overall distance he traveled. The known water routes Hyde utilized include the following: Miami-Erie Canal, Ohio River, Alleghany River, Delaware River, Susquehanna River, Atlantic Ocean, Rhine River, Main River, Danube River, Black Sea, Sea of Marmara, Dardanelles, Aegean Sea, Mediterranean Sea, Nile River (different branches in the Nile Delta), Ionian Sea, Adriatic Sea, English Channel, the Atlantic Ocean again, and the Mississippi River.

51. See Blair G. Van Dyke and LaMar C. Berrett, "In the Footsteps of Orson Hyde: Subsequent Dedications of the Holy Land," *BYU Studies* 47, no. 1 (2008): 57–93. Beginning with the 1873 group, women also participated, such as Eliza R. Snow and Clara Little.

52. For details of Spencer W. Kimball's visit to Jerusalem, see 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, 1978), 331.

53. Spencer W. Kimball, in *One Hundred Thirty-First Annual Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1961), 77–81.



Jerusalem at night, August 2016. Photograph by David M. Whitchurch. Courtesy BYU Jerusalem Center.

a provision that the program be balanced between Arab and Jewish territory.⁵⁴ That proviso continues to this day.

In 1968, under the direction of Daniel H. Ludlow, dean of Religious Education, twenty students and two faculty members (LaMar C. Berrett and Ellis T. Rasmussen) inaugurated the Jerusalem study abroad program.⁵⁵ The program started small with an average of approximately one hundred sixty students per year.⁵⁶ As it grew, so did the number of Church leaders who traveled to the Holy Land, including N. Eldon Tanner (1971), Hugh B. Brown (1971), Harold B. Lee (1972), Gordon B. Hinckley (1972), Howard W. Hunter (1972), Neal A. Maxwell (1972),⁵⁷ and James E. Faust (early 1980s).

The academic offerings of the program focused on biblical and contemporary studies that were correlated with a study of archaeology, biblical geography, Near Eastern history, Judaism, Islam, Near Eastern

54. *The World Is Our Campus*, 256, unpublished document for internal use by the Division of Continuing Education. See also *Brigham Young University: The First One Hundred Years*, ed. Ernest L. Wilkinson and Leonard J. Arrington, 4 vols. (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1976), 3:723–24.

55. The study abroad program was delayed because of the 1967 Six-Day War.

56. Michael White, “BYU Leases Land in Jerusalem as Site for a Studies Center,” *Deseret News*, May 25, 1984, B7.

57. Neal A. Maxwell was commissioner of the Church Educational System at the time.

languages, and international relations and politics, much as it is today. Studies were, and still are, enhanced with weekly field trips to biblical and historical sites in the Holy Land, including extended study tours that took the students to Jordan and Egypt.⁵⁸

Due to the Church's expanding presence in Jerusalem, the mayor of Jerusalem, Teddy Kollek, became acquainted with members of the Church, and during the mid-1970s, he contacted Church leaders in Salt Lake City to see if they were interested in developing a five-acre property on the Mount of Olives. He recommended it be named after Orson Hyde. President Spencer W. Kimball took immediate action. The needed funds were raised through donations, and the Orson Hyde Memorial Garden was dedicated by President Kimball on October 24, 1979, 138 years to the day after Elder Hyde's prayer on the Mount of Olives. In addition to President Kimball, his counselor N. Eldon Tanner and six Apostles attended the dedication, along with nearly two thousand members of the Church.⁵⁹

As the BYU study abroad program continued to grow, a search for property was approved. Elder Howard W. Hunter made six trips to the Holy Land in 1979. The day before the dedication of the Orson Hyde Memorial Garden, he went to see some twenty-six possible land sites. From those, he selected seven or eight to show President Kimball. The eventual site of the Center on Mount Scopus was not on the list.⁶⁰ Others on the program today will address what happened next.

Let me conclude with a personal comment. My first trip to the Holy Land was in the summer of 1984. I was a young seminary teacher participating in the "Lands of the Scriptures" workshop, and my wife and I were taken with other participants to a spot just below Hebrew University to view the Old City of Jerusalem. After pointing out the city's landmarks, our tour leaders—Paul H. Peterson and Karl S. Farnsworth—told us that we were standing on the site where Brigham Young University

58. David B. Galbraith, "Jerusalem, Center for Near Eastern Studies," in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, ed. Daniel H. Ludlow, 4 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 1:225–26. The student trip to Egypt was discontinued in 2011 following the outbreak of the revolution at Tahrir Square in Cairo. In its place was a trip to Turkey.

59. In addition to President Kimball, those present at the Orson Hyde Memorial Garden's dedication included N. Eldon Tanner, Howard W. Hunter, Ezra Taft Benson, LeGrand Richards, Marvin J. Ashton, and Eldred G. Smith.

60. Alan R. Casper, "Opposition to the Construction of the Brigham Young University Jerusalem Center" (master's thesis, Brigham Young University, 2003), 13. In addition, see remarks given elsewhere in this conference.

would build its Jerusalem Center for Near Eastern Studies. I knew little about the sacrifices, the heartaches, or the impossibilities involved in acquiring the land. Nor did I know anything of the miraculous events that would allow, in less than two months' time, construction to begin on that glorious building. What I did know, or should say felt, as I stood there that warm summer afternoon, was that Jerusalem was a city with a long past and a divine future. Somehow, like so many here today, I felt connected!

From time immemorial, Jerusalem has managed to be the epicenter of religious, political, and cultural conflict. As members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, however, we know through prophetic statements that ultimately these conflicts must cease and that Jerusalem will fulfill its destiny as a city of peace. Isaiah described it well: "Awake, awake; put on thy strength, O Zion; put on thy beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city: for henceforth there shall no more come into thee the uncircumcised and the unclean" (Isa. 52:1).

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