

NINETY-SEVENTH
ANNUAL
CONFERENCE

Of the Church of Jesus Christ of
Latter-day Saints

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Salt Lake City, Utah

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*With a Full Report of
All the Discourses*



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Jessie Williams sang a solo, "The Voice in the Wilderness."
(Isaiah 40.)

ELDER BRIGHAM H. ROBERTS

*Of the First Council of Seventy, and Former President of the
Eastern States Mission .*

My brethren and sisters, in view of the announcement made by President Heber J. Grant this morning, in regard to my being released from the Presidency of the Eastern States mission, I think it is quite likely that the parents, the brothers and sisters and friends of those who are now in the Eastern States on missions, would be glad to receive word from that mission as to the general welfare of their sons and daughters. I am happy to report to you that it is a general time of health with us, that all is well with your kindred and that the Spirit of the Lord is a common heritage, it seems to me, to all those who are now engaged in the work of the Lord in the Eastern States.

I wish to express my gratitude unto the Lord and to the authorities of the Church that I have had the opportunity of laboring during the past five years in that mission. It has been a time of great joy and satisfaction to me to be conscious of the esteem and friendship of the five hundred young people with whom I have come in contact since I began my labors in the Eastern States. To receive the friendship and feel the supporting influence of their confidence has produced in me a joy unspeakable. While I acquiesce fully in the release that has come to me, and recognize the wisdom of it, you will have to forgive me if I confess also that I received the word with some degree of personal sadness. I feel honored in the selection of my successor, and I wired that word to the secretary of the mission last night, and congratulated the mission upon the appointment of Elder Henry H. Rolapp, and I pray for a continuation of the *esprit de corps*, may I call it, of the mission. I am very sure that the mission force will give to him all the loyalty and the support they have given to me, and that the work of the Lord without let or hindrance will continue to expand even as it has in the past.

The Eastern States, in my judgment, is one of the noblest missions in the world. Within its boundaries are thirty-three millions of people; and of the cities in the United States that have a population of four hundred thousand and over, of the fifteen such cities, eight are within the boundaries of the Eastern States! I am happy in the reflection that there has been continued growth in the work, that each successive year in the five of my administration has been greater in its success than in the one that preceded it. During the time of my labors there has been an increase of four chapel buildings in the mission; that is, it will be four when the one under construction at the present time is completed. I was very happy before leaving New York to secure for the Manhattan or New York branch of our mission more adequate quarters, and more worthy of the chief branch of our mission. We secured quarters in the Carnegie building. We have now a beautiful hall with

suitable classrooms in it to assemble the classes of our Sabbath school, and also obtained one of the smaller halls for mid-week services for the Young Men's Mutual Improvement Association and the Relief Society, so that we will be more suitably located hereafter than in the immediate past, at least, in that important branch.

We are expending in the mission about eight thousand dollars yearly in rental for halls. This has been an increase in this item from three thousand dollars yearly to eight thousand. We have been successful in obtaining better halls and more of them, but of course at considerable increase of expense.

Among the outstanding features of our work in the Eastern States during my administration has been the holding of five mission schools. These schools have brought in about one-third of the whole mission force at a time to each school for intensified training during four solid weeks, and if I could take time to recite the curriculum of these schools you would agree with me that the training is both intensive and comprehensive.

It has been my pleasure to write thirteen new tracts for the mission since the opening of my administration; and these have not only been used in the Eastern States mission, but other missions also have taken up some of them in their work, and altogether, year after year, the work has grown. I am extremely happy to be conscious of the fact that we quit service on a "rising market."

There is one circumstance that I shall take the liberty of referring to a little in more detail. In New York City alone, that is, in greater New York, there are two millions of the House of Judah, and for the last several years I have been wondering how we could make an approach to those people, attract their attention, and have the material to present to them that would place in their hands the great message that God has for that branch of the House of Israel. In very many of the revelations to the Church, where the Lord sets forth this latter-day work, you will find this phraseology often employed when referring to the preaching of the gospel—"first unto the Gentiles, and then unto the Jews." That occurs quite a number of times in the revelations contained in the Doctrine and Covenants; and, of course, being in the midst of so large a population of the Jews, one's thought would naturally go out to them with a desire to get some word of our message over to them. Well, during the past six months, it seems to me that the way has wonderfully opened up in that direction, in the city of Binghamton, Broome county, New York, a name that will be familiar to many of you who are acquainted with the history of the Church, for it is territory in which the Prophet Joseph Smith operated during the translation of the Book of Mormon, and also in the early movements of the Church. It is only about twenty-three miles from this city that the Colesville branch was organized, which was the first community unit to begin the great work of the gathering together of our people to the west. It was the Colesville branch that as a body, and by cooperative methods of mutual assistance, moved through the states of New York and Ohio, halting for a while in Kirtland, and then continuing

their journey through Indiana and Illinois, and so on into Missouri, and to the western borders of that state, and made the first settlements in Jackson county, Missouri. Well, in Binghampton, near where this stream of western migration started, came our opening for an approach to the House of Judah. There is in that place a converted Jew, who is converted to Christianity, but not to our gospel, the true Christianity. He accepts Christ as the Messiah of the Jews, and he publishes a magazine entitled *The Redeemed Hebrew*. He received a paper from a Jewish Rabbi, in Canada, in which the Rabbi set forth his reasons for rejecting Jesus Christ as the Messiah, and concluded that it would be sin for him, and disloyalty to Jehovah for him to accept Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah. The article was published and an invitation extended to Christian ministers to answer the Rabbi, an editorial note stating that the paper which should most completely answer the Rabbi would be published in the magazine. It may be a bit out of good taste for me to say it, perhaps, but the paper which I submitted to the magazine was accepted and published as a reply to the Rabbi. After the first article was published, I thought it needed a little amplification, and so I sent in a second article, and that, too, was published. Then it seemed to me that we had just reached the threshold of the subject, and there was just a fine opening made for proclaiming our message, God's message to the Jews, as we may gather it from the Book of Mormon; for, as pointed out by President Anthony W. Ivins this morning, the outstanding feature of our Book of Mormon scriptures is, that the book shall be a witness to the Gentiles and especially to Jews, that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and the very Eternal God, manifesting himself to all nations. That is found, as you all know, on the title page of the Book of Mormon, which the Prophet Joseph Smith declared was not his composition. He found it engraven on the title page of the gold plates.

When I sent this third article to the editor of *The Redeemed Hebrew* he informed me that it made thirteen pages of his magazine; and as he expected to devote the whole magazine to that paper, he said he could publish sixteen pages nearly at the same cost as thirteen, and would I supplement what I had written with something further. I did so. When that was published it made eighteen pages instead of sixteen; but he refused to select the part to be cut down, and I did not have the heart to sacrifice any part of it, so the eighteen pages were published.

In the supplemental matter I sent to him, I used what I have before used as a theme, I think in this tabernacle; namely, "A Prophetic Page of the Book of Mormon." I am sorry that we do not have here one of the older editions of the Book of Mormon, because then I could conscientiously tell you that all the prophecies that I referred to were upon one page of the Book of Mormon, but in our more recent editions, in dividing the pages into two columns for each page, that particular group of prophecies are distributed over two pages. But it only makes sufficient matter for one page, and I think I may still say that it is a "prophetic page of the Book of Mormon." You will find it now in your current editions on page 101 and page 102; in the older

editions it occupied page 122. Of course, I shall not have time to enter into a discussion of all these prophecies of this page—there are five of them; but suffice it to say that the first prophecy predicts, that many shall believe in the Book of Mormon; and, second, that they shall carry the words of that book unto the remnants of the land, meaning of course, the American Indians, descendants of the Nephites and the Lamanites of ancient times; and third, that the remnants of those ancient people shall know their origin, that they are descendants of Israel; the gospel shall be declared among them, that they shall believe it, the scales of darkness shall fall from their eyes, and before many generations pass away, they shall become a white and delightsome people. Then we come to the prophecies that are germane to what I want to tell you. It is declared on this prophetic page:

“And it shall come to pass that the Jews which are scattered also shall begin to believe in Christ.”

That is a subject that I have had under consideration during many years, and I have made a considerable collection of utterances from prominent Jewish Rabbis that indicate a marked change of mental attitude on the part of leading Jews towards Jesus of Nazareth. I think perhaps one of the most striking of these utterances, and one that indicates the whole shifting of thought on the part of Jews toward the Christ, was uttered March 25, 1901, by Rabbi Isador Singer, Doctor of Philosophy, in New York City. He said:

“I regard Jesus of Nazareth as a Jew of the Jews, one whom all Jewish people are beginning to love. His teaching has been an immense service to all the world in bringing Israel’s God to the knowledge of hundreds of millions of mankind. The great change in the Jewish thought concerning Jesus of Nazareth I cannot better illustrate than by this fact. When I was a boy had my father, who was a very pious man, heard the name of Jesus uttered from the pulpit of our synagogue, he and every other man in the congregation would have left the building, and the rabbi would have been dismissed at once. Now it is not a strange thing in many synagogues to hear sermons preached eulogistic of this Jesus, and nobody thinks of protesting. In fact, *we are all glad to claim Jesus as one of our people.*”

About a year ago Rabbi Wise of New York, in Carnegie Hall, the hall that is near to ours now in the Carnegie Building, before a record crowd in his lecture room declared that:

“Jesus of Nazareth was a man, not a myth, as I had been taught in my earlier manhood Jesus was; that is, he existed,” said the Rabbi. “I accept this despite the information I had been led to believe earlier in my life, a notion that Jesus was a myth, and never existed. I tell you, and I will repeat these words to every Jew in the world if need be: Jesus was, and we must accept this fact at once. Shall we not say that this Jew [Jesus] is soul of our soul, and that the soul of his teaching is Jewish, and nothing but Jewish? The teaching of Jesus, the Jew, is a phase of the spirit which has led the Jew Godward.”

I could continue to read to you many excerpts of this kind, more than twenty such excerpts are written in the third article of *The Redeemed Hebrew*, that I told you about. It merely tends to show that the Jew is “beginning to believe in Christ.” He has not yet accepted

him as the Son of God, as God manifested in the flesh, the Redeemer of the world, and the one who fulfills the Messianic prophecies of the Old Testament. There is nothing in this movement that indicates belief of Jesus in that way; but there is much that proclaims the fact that the Jews are "beginning" to admire, they are beginning to accept as a great religious teacher this Jesus of Nazareth; to respect him. Ultimately that respect will turn to love, and love will turn to acceptance of him as the Son of God. There will be some, at least, of the House of Judah who will begin to react toward this message, this proclamation, that our Book of Mormon makes as to the Deity of the Christ, "the Eternal God" manifested in the flesh.

The second part of this prophecy is that not only shall "the Jews which are scattered begin to believe in Christ," but "they shall begin to gather in upon the face of the land;" that is, begin to gather to their promised land, to Palestine.

I remember that the British Consular reports of 1856, said that less than fifteen thousand Jews were in all Palestine. Twenty years later this number had increased to sixty-five thousand. Then came the Zionite movement, under the leadership of Dr. Herzal, supplemented later by the influence of Israel Zangwell, a Jewish writer of some note, and what is known as the "Zionite movement" received an impetus, and began to grow in the minds of the Jews until there began what we may now call the modern gathering together of the Jews in Palestine. The gathering is continuing. Millions of dollars have been subscribed by that people to establish their exiled brethren in the land of their fathers, and the ambition is to resume the national history of the Jewish people. That movement has grown until it has attained large proportions, and very wide interest in the world. This prophecy, then, is in course of fulfilment—"The Jews that are scattered are beginning to gather in upon the land of their forefathers, to the land of Palestine and to Jerusalem!"

We may pause here to ask what is the motive power, what is behind all this movement—this change in the mental attitude of that people towards Christ;—this gathering together of the Jews in Palestine? This is the explanation of it: In the Kirtland Temple, in 1835, Israel's great prophet, Moses, appeared to Joseph and Oliver Cowdery and delivered to them the keys of the gathering of Israel and the restoration of the Ten Tribes from the land of the North. In 1840, in pursuance of this work, an apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ, an apostle of this new dispensation, a Jew, by the way, was appointed by the Prophet Joseph to a special mission to the Holy Land, to Palestine, to dedicate that land for the gathering of the Jews to Jerusalem, and to bless the Jews with a disposition to return to their land and to their city. The mission of Orson Hyde is well known to the Latter-day Saints; how, under very great difficulties, trials and hardships, he made his way to Jerusalem, went to the summit of the Mount of Olives, and there wrote out a prayer that God put into his heart, dedicating the land of Palestine for the return of the Jews, and for the renewal of their national existence. That prayer—and it is a most wonderful

prayer—has been published many times in our periodicals. It is published also in the *History of the Church*, which is derived chiefly from the office journal of the Prophet Joseph. Orson Hyde, returning from his mission when in Alexandria, also wrote to the *Millennial Star* of the then current date and there made a rather wonderful prediction. He said in substance that it was by political power that Judah had been broken and scattered abroad, and that it would be by the exercise of political power that Judah would be restored; and furthermore he declared that *England* would be the leading national power that would befriend Judah, and aid him in the re-establishment of his people in the land of Palestine. This was published in the *Millennial Star* of 1842, and may be found by those curious enough to seek for the source of this information.

That is the source of the power underlying the development of this great work. God is moving underneath all these facts—this changing of the mental attitude of Jews towards Jesus—this latter-day gathering of the Jews to the land and this city of their fathers.

It is interesting to note that the predictions of Orson Hyde, the man set apart to perform this special mission, in behalf of Judah, are being wonderfully fulfilled. The defeat of the Turks in the World War was by British forces under the English General Sir Edmund Allenby. The official entrance of General Allenby into Jerusalem on the 11th of December, 1917, and the subsequent course of England in respect of Palestine; the fact that Great Britain now holds the administration of the affairs of that land under the appointment of the League of Nations,—this fills out the story of Elder Orson Hyde's mission, and prophecy. The policy of England in respect to its administration of the affairs of Palestine as foreshadowed in the declaration by Lord Balfour when, on the 2nd of November, 1919, he said officially, and with the approval of France, Italy and President Wilson of the United States:

“His Majesty's Government view with favor the establishment in Palestine of a National home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavors to facilitate the achievement of this object.”

England has ever since consistently pursued that policy; and is now pursuing it.

I regret that I have taken more time than I should have done, but I think these matters of sufficient importance to have entered upon the record of this conference, and I wish to say, my brethren and sisters, that I cannot but regard the opening that has come to us in the Eastern States to furnish material by which we may approach our cousin Judah with the message of the Book of Mormon, as an opening of the way by the inspiration and power of the Spirit of the Lord. I may not have made that very clear to you, but I feel it in my own heart, and I pray that God will bless this branch of his people, the Jews, and that the time will come when we shall have larger access to these people in the proclamation of God's message to them. I hope so, and pray for it, in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.