

Unlocking the Doors

M. RUSSELL BALLARD

Two weeks ago, President Dean L. Larsen and I returned from South America, where we visited with members and missionaries in Bolivia, Peru, and Colombia. I am happy to report that the work continues to go forward in spite of the current violence present there.

Many of you served your missions in those countries, and I know you are concerned about what is happening in South America. For many years we have enjoyed relative peace while doing missionary work in the world. However, in some places today we find it necessary to teach members and missionaries how to protect themselves in a world of increasing violence. The Prophet Joseph Smith saw the challenges of doing missionary work in this dispensation.

From Small Beginnings

May I share with you this morning the remarkable growth of the Church, as prophesied by the Prophet Joseph Smith. One hundred eighty-three years have now passed since the Prophet's birth. We must never forget his perseverance in the face of incredible hardships and opposition to bring forth the priesthood, new scriptures, complete doctrines, full ordinances, and covenants to exalt men and

women through membership in the restored Church of Jesus Christ.

In the earliest years of the development of the Church, at a time when its enemies already were making great efforts to stop the work, the Prophet knew that no enemy present or future would have sufficient power to frustrate and stop the purposes of God. Even Joseph's closest associates in those early years did not understand that the Church would roll forth from small beginnings to fill the entire world as prophesied by the Old Testament prophet Daniel (see Daniel 1).

At age twenty-seven, Wilford Woodruff was present at a meeting called by the Prophet Joseph in Kirtland, Ohio, early in 1834. At this time, the Saints who had gathered in Missouri were suffering great persecutions. Mobs had driven them from their homes in Jackson County. Some had tried to establish themselves in neighboring counties, but persecutions followed them. The Prophet had announced the

M. Russell Ballard was a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints when this devotional address was given at Brigham Young University on 14 November 1989.

intention to go to Missouri and had enlisted a number of volunteers to go as Zion's Camp to rescue the Saints there. Wilford Woodruff gives a vivid description of the Prophet's message to the elders who met in preparation for the Zion's Camp march:

On Sunday night the Prophet called on all who held the Priesthood to gather into the little log school house they had there. It was a small house, perhaps 14 feet square. But it held the whole of the Priesthood of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints who were then in the town of Kirtland, and who had gathered together to go off in Zion's camp. That was the first time I ever saw Oliver Cowdery, or heard him speak; the first time I ever saw Brigham Young or Heber C. Kimball, and the two Pratts, and Orson Hyde and many others. There were no Apostles in the Church except Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery. When we got together the Prophet called upon the Elders of Israel with him to bear testimony of this work. Those that I have named spoke, and a good many that I have not named, bore their testimonies. When they got through the Prophet said, "Brethren, I have been very much edified and instructed in your testimonies here tonight, but I want to say to you before the Lord, that you know no more concerning the destinies of this Church and the kingdom than a babe upon its mother's lap. You don't comprehend it." I was rather surprised. Then the prophet said, "It is only a little handful of Priesthood you see here tonight, but this Church will fill North and South America—it will fill the world." [CR, April 1898, p. 57]

You will detect in this statement by Joseph Smith no element of cautious forecasting. He certainly did not predict future growth based on past trends. He gave a bold statement, a prophecy—given by the Spirit of the Lord.

You may remember that the Articles of Faith first appeared in a letter that Joseph Smith wrote to Mr. John Wentworth, the editor of a Chicago newspaper. In the Wentworth

letter, which was dated 1 March 1842, Joseph Smith wrote a vision of the destiny of the Church in a profound prophecy. He wrote:

The Standard of Truth has been erected; no unhallowed hand can stop the work from progressing; persecutions may rage, mobs may combine, armies may assemble, calumny may defame, but the truth of God will go forth boldly, nobly, and independent, till it has penetrated every continent, visited every clime, swept every country, and sounded in every ear, till the purposes of God shall be accomplished, and the Great Jehovah shall say the work is done. [HC 4:540]

Since the organization of the Church in 1830, nearly sixteen decades have passed. We have had 158 years to observe what has happened in the fulfillment of his prophecy. Together, let us see how the truth of God has swept the nations despite persecutions and opposition. Let us see how continents and countries have been penetrated and what peoples of the world have heard the gospel sound in their ears. Let us also review selected examples of opposing efforts of the "unhallowed hands" of the enemy: how persecutions have raged, how mobs have combined, how armies have assembled, and how calumny has defamed. (In case you are not familiar with the term calumny, it is a false charge or misrepresentation given maliciously to damage another person's reputation.)

In the Face of Opposition

Although the Church began its first decade with only six members, "unhallowed hands" made every effort to stop the spread of the gospel and destroy the Church in its infancy. Joseph Smith soon learned how mobs may combine. From Church history we read:

Certain residents of Hiram, Ohio, vented their personal feelings with mob action directed against the Prophet and Sidney Rigdon. Stimulated by

whiskey and hidden behind blackened faces, a gang of more than two dozen men dragged Joseph from his bed during the night of March 24, 1832.

Choking him into submission, they stripped him naked, scratched his skin with their fingernails, tore his hair, and then smeared his body with tar and feathers. A vial of nitric acid forced against his teeth splashed on his face; a front tooth was broken. Meanwhile other members of the mob dragged Rigdon by the heels from his home, bumping his head on the frozen ground, which left him delirious for days. The Prophet's friends spent the night removing the tar to help him keep a Sunday morning appointment. He addressed a congregation that included Simonds Ryder, organizer of the mob.

[James B. Allen and Glen M. Leonard, *The Story of the Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), p. 71]

Ryder was a convert who disaffected because the Prophet Joseph misspelled his name.

A year later, another mob destroyed the *Evening and Morning Star* printing office, interrupting the publication of the Book of Commandments, a collection of divine revelations received through Joseph Smith.

Joseph Smith also learned how calumny may defame. In 1834, Eber D. Howe published *Mormonism Unveiled*, the first anti-Mormon book. It included a variety of old and new charges against Joseph Smith's credibility and tried to undermine the veracity of the Book of Mormon.

The Saints in Missouri found out in a tragic manner how the armies of the enemy may assemble. In 1838, Governor Lilburn W. Boggs of Missouri issued the infamous "Order of Extermination," and our history records the tragedy at Haun's Mill.

Despite intense opposition against all efforts to erect the standard of truth, 597 missionaries were set apart during the 1830s, and nearly 20,000 converts joined the restored Church during that first decade. Missionaries

taught and baptized people in most of the states then in the Union, and both Canada and Great Britain were opened to the preaching of the gospel. The gospel message penetrated two continents and began to sweep across three nations.

Heber C. Kimball was one of the great missionaries in the early years of the Church. He was a friend of the Prophet Joseph Smith and a relative of Brigham Young. He was tall and he was bald even when he was young. People liked to tease him about his baldness, and he one time gave the following explanation of how he lost his hair. Shortly after joining the Church, Heber was called as a very young man to serve a mission to Nova Scotia. He traveled the entire 1,500 miles from his home in New York on foot, with his valise on his back. Heber said of this mission:

Soon after I started I found that I was rather unlearned, though I knew that before, but I knew it better after I started.

*I began to study the Scriptures, . . . and I had so little knowledge that the exercise of study began to swell my head and open my pores insomuch that the hairs dropped out; and if you will let your minds expand as mine did you will have no hair on your heads. [JD 4:107; quoted in Leonard J. Arrington's *Church History and the Achievement of Identity*]*

Heber C. Kimball was a man of great faith and good humor. I hope for those of you whose hair is thinning that it is for the same reason.

These early missionaries succeeded in the face of all opposition because they had the unwavering faith to open their mouths and declare the truth and because they took with them the mighty sword of the Lord's Spirit (see D&C 27:16–17). They remembered the baptismal covenant to "stand as witnesses of God at all times and in all things, and in all places . . . even until death" (Mosiah 18:9).

The same year that Lorenzo Snow set out on his first mission, the Prophet Joseph Smith gave Heber C. Kimball a very significant missionary assignment. The Prophet Joseph approached Heber while the latter was seated in the Kirtland Temple. Joseph said:

Brother Heber, the Spirit of the Lord has whispered to me: "Let my servant Heber go to England and proclaim my Gospel, and open the door of salvation to that nation." [Orson F. Whitney, *Life of Heber C. Kimball, an Apostle* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, Inc., 1967), p. 103]

The First Presidency and the Twelve hold the keys for opening the nations to missionary work (see D&C 107:35). When the pattern has been followed of calling an apostle to open a land to the preaching of the gospel, great success has resulted. Heber C. Kimball baptized more than one thousand converts in the western part of England during his mission. He and his companions laid the foundation for future growth in that great nation. Of this early work, Joseph Smith said:

The work in which we are unitedly engaged is one of no ordinary kind. The enemies we have to contend against are subtle and well skilled in manoeuvring; it behooves us to be on the alert to concentrate our energies, and that the best feelings should exist in our midst; and then, by the help of the Almighty, we shall go on from victory to victory, and from conquest to conquest; our evil passions will be subdued, our prejudices depart; we shall find no room in our bosoms for hatred; vice will hide its deformed head, and we shall stand approved in the sight of heaven, and be acknowledged the sons of God. [HC 4:231]

During the 1840s, persecutions continued to rage, especially against the Prophet Joseph Smith. In 1841 he was arrested in Illinois on a fugitive warrant issued by Governor Boggs of Missouri, but Judge Stephen A. Douglas of

Quincy, Illinois, ruled the writ ineffective and released the prisoner. A year later, John C. Bennett, mayor of Nauvoo, plotted to assassinate the Prophet. After the plot failed, Bennett resigned as mayor, was expelled from the Church, and later wrote a scandalous account entitled *The History of the Saints; or an Exposé of Joe Smith and the Mormons*. The persecutions culminated on 27 June 1844. Joseph and Hyrum were killed by a mob that rushed Carthage Jail.

In the midst of all these difficulties, 1,454 missionaries were set apart during the 1840s. Church membership grew to more than 48,000. Missionaries made initial visits to Australia, India, Jamaica, South America, and Germany. Although the early work in these countries was limited and resulted in only a few scattered conversions, the servants of the Lord began learning valuable lessons about how to reach out to people of different cultures. In 1841, Orson Hyde visited and dedicated Israel for the gathering of the Jews. Despite the great difficulty of travel, the restored gospel penetrated three more continents.

During the 1840s Wilford Woodruff, who had been tutored by the Prophet Joseph and later ordained an apostle, was sent as a missionary to England. The success of his missionary work in southern England in 1840 may be unparalleled. Because of the great faith of Wilford Woodruff, Heber C. Kimball, and other missionaries and their ability to follow the promptings of the Spirit, the truth of God began to sweep a nation and sound in many ears.

Although much of the energy of the Saints in the 1850s was devoted to the migration to Utah and the development of a new home, missionary work continued, as did the persecutions. In May 1857, Elder Parley P. Pratt of the Council of the Twelve was assassinated while on a mission in Arkansas. In the same month, United States President Buchanan issued orders for an army to assemble at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, to march to Utah on

false assumptions that the people of Utah were in rebellion against the United States. This was the beginning of the so-called “Utah War.” Two months later, in July, Brigham Young received word that an American army, under the command of General Albert Johnston, was approaching Utah. Church leaders took the position that they had violated no laws and decided to allow no military “invasion” to drive them from their homes. In June 1858, after having been stopped for the winter by delaying tactics of the Mormons, General Johnston’s army finally entered the Salt Lake Valley, but did so peacefully.

In the 1850s, 705 missionaries were set apart. Missions of the Church were opened in Scandinavia, France, Italy, Switzerland, and Hawaii. Initial missionary work began also in such parts of the world as India, Hong Kong, Thailand, Burma, South Africa, and the West Indies. Many of these efforts were discontinued after a few years. However, the Scandinavian Mission, organized in 1850, baptized about a thousand converts each year during the decade, mostly in Denmark. Missionaries in Britain baptized more than 15,000 converts, who then left for Utah between 1849 and 1857. At the end of the decade, missionaries were teaching the gospel in fifteen nations and two territories. Worldwide Church membership numbered more than 57,000.

Members of the Church enjoyed little public favor in the early years of our history. However, “attitudes improved somewhat during the 1860s, partly because the Civil War diverted attention elsewhere, and partly because of Mormon cooperation in building the transcontinental railroad. But that didn’t last. Polygamy debates led to the Edmunds-Tucker Act, bringing the Church in the 1880s to a low point in terms of public contempt” (William B. Smart, “Changing Attitudes,” *Church News*, 5 January 1980).

President John Taylor and the Saints of his day certainly experienced how persecutions

may rage. The Edmunds-Tucker Act of 1887 “seemed designed to destroy the Church itself, eliminating both polygamy and the influence of the Church on Utah’s political life” (Allen and Leonard, *The Story of the Latter-day Saints*, p. 404). Among other stringent provisions, the law disincorporated the Church, abolished female suffrage, and ordered the confiscation of practically all Church property.

Outside of Utah, unhallowed hands continued to oppose the work. In Georgia, Joseph Standing and his missionary companions were walking on a public road near the county line of Catoosa and Whitfield counties when they were compelled by a mob to go to an isolated spot in the woods. Elder Standing was shot by a mob member when he put up some resistance to move to another spot.

Notwithstanding this and other acts of persecution, in the three decades from 1860 to 1890, 4,458 missionaries were set apart. Worldwide membership grew from 57,000 to 183,000. Four stakes developed into twenty-two stakes. At the end of the 1880s, missionaries were serving in twenty nations and three territories. During this decade, doors were opened, and sustained missionary efforts began in the Netherlands, Iceland, Finland, Belgium, and Samoa. For varying periods, from a few months to twenty-five years, missionaries labored also in Armenia, Syria, Israel, Egypt, Turkey, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Burma, and India.

The forty-year period from 1890 to 1930 brought some improvement in public attitudes toward the Church:

The Manifesto disclaiming polygamy in 1890 helped reverse the trend. So did an active public relations campaign for statehood, ushering in a period of less-bitter but still generally hostile attitudes, running from 1890 to the late 1920s. The Church and its doctrine were still disliked during this period, but [news] articles began to speak of the people themselves as basically good with high

potential. This was the period during which B. H. Roberts and Reed Smoot were elected to Congress but Reed Smoot had to fight to be seated. . . . The national debate hurt the Church image badly, but it gradually improved during a long career in which Reed Smoot became one of the country's leading senators. [Smart, "Changing Attitudes"]

Opposition to the Church heated up in early 1922, owing in some part to the influence of the movie entitled *Trapped by the Mormons*. The uneventful days of tracting in the British Mission were a thing of the past. On 10 January 1922, Ezra Taft Benson mentioned in his journal, without elaboration, the movie's author: "Winnifred Graham on our track again." The next day Elder Benson was evicted from one house, and a week later still "more stories of the terrible Mormons were being circulated." On Sunday, January 29, someone attempted to break up one of their meetings. A week later he wrote, "Tracting in South Street, women rather excited, afraid they're going to be taken to Utah."

Moving This Great Work Forward

Persecutions still raged in the twentieth century. But the truth of God continued to go forth boldly as Joseph Smith had prophesied. On 3 September 1925, President Heber J. Grant announced that the First Presidency had decided to open missionary work in South America. Following the Lord's pattern for unlocking the doors of the kingdom in all nations, the First Presidency called Elder Melvin J. Ballard, a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles and my own grandfather, along with Rulon S. Wells and Rey L. Pratt of the First Council of the Seventy to go to South America. They were called to dedicate the land for the preaching of the gospel, to open a mission there, and to lay the foundation for establishing the Church in that vast continent. After a three-week journey by ship, covering more than seven thousand miles, the three

missionaries arrived in Buenos Aires in December 1925.

On Christmas morning of 1925, at 7:00 a.m., Elder Ballard dedicated the land. The missionary work was very slow and difficult in those early months. Of the sixteen people attending the first Church meeting, almost all were German immigrants. In the first ten months while grandfather was there, the missionaries saw only a small handful of converts join the Church; perhaps only one or two of them were native Latin people. However, before leaving South America on 4 July 1926, Elder Ballard prophesied:

*The work of the Lord will grow slowly for a time here just as an oak grows slowly from an acorn. It will not shoot up in a day as does the sunflower that grows quickly and then dies. But thousands will join the Church here. It will be divided into more than one mission and will be one of the strongest in the Church. The work here is the smallest that it will ever be. The day will come when the Lamanites in this land will be given a chance. The South American Mission will be a power in the Church. [Melvin J. Ballard, *Crusader for Righteousness* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1966), p. 84]*

Brothers and sisters, many of you are aware of the remarkable growth of the Church in South America.

During the forty years from 1890 to 1930, 31,449 missionaries were set apart for fulltime missions. Worldwide Church membership more than tripled from 183,000 to 663,000. Thirty-two stakes developed into 104 stakes. By the end of the 1920s, missionaries were serving in twenty-seven nations and three territories. Significant new missionary efforts were begun in Japan, Bolivia, Brazil, and the island country of Tonga, in addition to the new efforts in Argentina and South America that I have just described.

Beginning in 1930, national attitudes toward members of the Church entered a new stage:

Several factors brought it on. Radio began carrying throughout the country broadcasts of the remarkable Mormon Tabernacle Choir. The Church's care-for-our-own teachings that led to a new vigor in the Welfare system during the depths of the depression conveyed an impression of character and independence. For the first time, the balance of magazine articles about the Church became, in the mid-30s, more positive than negative.

[President] Heber J. Grant did much to lift the image of the Church with national business and political leaders. Attitudes improved steadily during the following years as the Church's patriotism and loyalty were demonstrated during World War II, as Mormons became prominent in government, business, sports, and other fields, and as a growing missionary system and membership brought Mormons into neighborly contact with much of the population. [Smart, "Changing Attitudes"]

During the four decades from 1930 to 1970, 106,799 full-time missionaries were set apart. Worldwide Church membership increased fourfold from 663,000 to 2,807,456. More than one million new members were added just in the decade of the 1960s. One hundred and four stakes developed into 630 stakes. By 1970, missionaries were serving in forty-three nations and nine territories. During this forty-year period, the South American nations of Uruguay, Paraguay, Ecuador, Colombia, Peru, and Venezuela were opened to missionary work. Church leaders reopened missionary work in Chile. In Central America, servants of the Lord unlocked the nations of Panama, Costa Rica, Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, and Nicaragua. In Asia, major new efforts began to bear fruit in Korea, Taiwan, Singapore, and the Philippines.

Of course, persecutions will always be with us, just as the Prophet Joseph prophesied. In

recent years, the Church has been attacked openly by the producers of the film *The Godmakers*. A concerted effort by this band of enemies of the Church is underway at this very hour. During recent media coverage of forged documents related to Church history, Elder Dallin H. Oaks detailed instances of blatant misrepresentation and distortion (remember how calumny may defame) and how corrective information was ignored by prominent newspapers such as the *New York Times* and the *Los Angeles Times*. Malicious charges leveled against prominent leaders of the Church have not ended. The adversary has not ceased to work. Today we continue to face opposition, and we can expect it to continue as we endeavor to move this great work forward.

The Challenges of Continuing Growth

Nevertheless, we are now seeing a great acceleration in the fulfillment of Joseph Smith's prophecy that the "Truth of God will penetrate every continent, visit every clime, sweep every country, and sound in every ear."

President Spencer W. Kimball led the Church to new heights in carrying the gospel to the people of the world. The Church called many more missionaries, and a greatly increased number of missionaries from their native lands were enlisted into the work. President Kimball called for a widened vision of the work and asked members of the Church to lengthen their stride in moving the gospel across the face of the earth. He called upon the Church to use all of the media—newspapers, magazines, television, radio—in their greatest power to convey the gospel message to the unreached millions throughout the earth.

During the fifteen years from 1970 to the end of 1985 when President Kimball died, 230,195 missionaries were set apart to serve full-time missions, more than double the number set apart in the preceding forty years. Worldwide Church membership grew from 2,807,456 to 5,919,481—three million additional

members. The number of stakes increased from 630 to 1,582. Missionary work was opened or reopened in many countries including India, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, Micronesia, Kiribati, and other island nations in the Caribbean and the Pacific. Conversion miracles were happening in many lands. I give an example from my own ministry.

During the last week of January 1988, the First Presidency sent me to Lima, Peru, where we had eleven stakes of the Church. Because of the rapid and healthy growth of the Church in that city, I and the Area Presidency had the privilege of organizing seven additional stakes in one weekend to make a total of eighteen stakes. I truly saw my grandfather's and Joseph Smith's prophecies fulfilled. A miracle had been accomplished there by the power of the Lord's Spirit working through his authorized servants, the missionaries.

In the continent of South America, the one mission organized in 1925 has now been divided into thirty-eight. The sixteen people present at the original Church meeting now have multiplied many times over into a Church membership in South America of more than 900,000 people organized into more than 200 stakes of Zion. The three missionaries who arrived in Buenos Aires in 1925 have swelled into an army of 5,650. Four temples are now in operation, with more to be constructed in the future.

We now are led by another great prophet-leader, President Ezra Taft Benson. During the three years that he has presided over the Church, fulfillment of prophecy is apparent to every spiritually attuned observer. During the short period, almost four years now, 90,000 missionaries have been set apart and sent into the world to proclaim the glad tidings of the Restoration. Worldwide Church membership has now increased to more than 7,000,000. We now have 1,736 stakes of Zion. Our current force of 40,000 missionaries, serving in 226

missions in eighty-eight nations and twenty-two territories, has brought by the power of the Spirit more than 256,000 convert baptisms in 1988. Converts for 1989 will likely exceed 300,000. The Book of Mormon is being distributed and read as never before in our history.

The day of 50,000 to 60,000 full-time missionaries is not far off; the work will continue to grow and prosper throughout the world. You probably have read about the near-miraculous approval given to the Church by the government of the German Democratic Republic to allow foreign missionaries to teach in the German Democratic Republic and to allow their youth to serve outside their country. In recent years, the Lord's servants have unlocked the door and opened the work in Poland, Hungary, and Yugoslavia as well. They have opened many nations of Africa, including Zimbabwe, Nigeria, Ghana, Zaire, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Swaziland, and the Ivory Coast. Twenty-two nations and territories have been opened in just the last five years. Many others have been opened and will be opened to the preaching of the gospel.

I feel the same as Orson Pratt when he said in 1859:

How could a young man, inexperienced as Joseph Smith was, have had all this foreknowledge of future events, unless he was inspired of God? . . . How could he know, if a church should arise, that it would have any influence beyond his own neighbourhood? How did he know it would extend through the State of New York, where it was first raised? How could he know that it would extend over the United States, and much more, that it would go to all nations and kingdoms of the Gentiles? . . .

To prophesy that a church would arise and have place in all the nations and kingdoms of the Gentiles, and then to prophesy that the "mother of harlots" would gather together vast multitudes among all these nations and fight against the Saints, is taking a step far beyond what an imposter

would undertake, if he were disposed to successfully impose upon mankind. [JD 7:182–83]

I wonder what Brother Pratt would add if he saw the growth of the Church in our day. This review of Church growth from the Prophet's time to ours is one more reason we know without question that Joseph Smith was a prophet of God.

When Elder Larsen and I witnessed firsthand the profound growth of the Church in the face of the current violence and challenges in South America, my testimony was expanded greatly. My testimony to you students is that this is the Church of Jesus Christ, and the Savior's work will continue to roll forth in the world. Those of you who are preparing to serve the Lord as missionaries, I call upon you to prepare well. Your day in Church history is yet to be written. It will be what you make of it. To those of you who have returned from your missionary service, remain true and faithful, for you will lead the Church in the

coming years with the challenges of continued growth.

Oh, that I would have the power to open your eyes and cause you to see the vision of what yet lies ahead. Many of you sitting here as students of Brigham Young University will carry a remarkable role in fulfilling the prophecies of the Prophet Joseph Smith until that day does come when the great Jehovah shall say, "It is enough."

God bless you my beloved young people that your faith may be strong and powerful, that you will be up to that responsibility that will surely be yours. I testify to you that I know Jesus Christ is the Son of God. He presides over this work. He is directing it through his prophets and his apostles here upon the earth. To this I testify, leaving my witness and blessing with you that we will not shrink from our responsibility in writing the future history of 1989 until the great Jehovah comes once again. For this I pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.