

“The Ends of the Earth Shall Inquire After Thy Name”

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During the observance of the 200th anniversary of the birth of the Prophet Joseph Smith, Church members have been reminded of the breadth and depth of his influence as the priesthood leader of this dispensation. Our knowledge has been renewed of the miracles associated with the coming forth and spreading of the gospel, the growth of the Church, and the continuing role of modern-day prophets who lead the Church in latter-day preparation to greet the Savior in a coming day as He ushers in the millennial era. We expect the Prophet Joseph to be with Him when He comes!

How do we prepare to meet the Savior? As we follow the Prophet, every faithful member of the Church must understand and accept a personal commitment to support the work of carrying the message of the restored gospel to the world. The life of each Church member will continue to be directly affected by missionary responsibility. We or our families will have been brought into the Church by missionaries, be now preparing for a mission, have already served at least one mission, or be supporting and sustaining others in fulfilling their calls. Knowledge about how the work is unfolding across the world will strengthen our faith and our desire to fulfill our personal missionary responsibilities.

I pray for the sustaining influence of the Holy Spirit as I offer thoughts about the Prophet Joseph and the coming forth of the Church on the African continent. The dedication of the Accra Ghana Temple in January of 2004 and of the Aba Nigeria Temple one month ago have been acknowledged by President Hinckley as truly miraculous in many ways, and these dedications constitute important parts of the fulfillment of the 1839 prophecy to Joseph Smith in Liberty Jail, when he was told, “The ends of the earth shall inquire after thy name” (D&C 122:1).¹

Africa remains substantially unknown to most of the world. Although it occupies nearly 20 percent of the earth’s surface and its population is almost 15 percent of the world’s total, there are still relatively few who have visited the continent or found reason to inform themselves about it.

For those who have been there, simply hearing the word *Africa* is exhilarating. It arouses an unending panorama of images and emotions for those who have visited the broad plains, the wondrous natural sights, the small

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villages, and the teeming cities or who have met any of the vast variety of heartwarming, disarmingly positive, and resourceful African people. A spiritual dimension is evidenced in the lives of so many of them, and they are warmly open and responsive to any sincere expression of friendship. It is primarily the African people who inspire such positive reactions and loyalties from foreign observers, but natural and physical Africa does as well.

Physically, Africa is vast, enormously complicated, and not easily described. It is a huge landmass of deserts, rain forests, boundless plains, wild animals, uncountable millions of people, and the ironies of fabulous wealth in resources, glorious natural beauty, and great human promise—all alongside terrible disease, grinding poverty, and incessant famine. It is challenging in its scale, including nearly 12 million square miles (slightly fewer than Asia), and is the world's second-largest continent. It is more than three times the size of the United States, and its continental area is large enough to encompass the USA, China, India, Europe, Argentina, and New Zealand combined.

Africa's anthropological heritage has provided evidence that qualify parts of it to be called "the cradle of human civilization" and prove the continent to have been the home of well-developed kingdoms several hundred years before the Christian era. Extensive trade routes from the East crossed Africa from the Arab states and Asia, as did trans-Saharan routes from the Guinea Coast to North Africa that have linked the subcontinent to Europe for more than a thousand years. Beginning in the seventh century A.D., Islam spread steadily across these routes from the Arab peninsula through North Africa.

From as early as the ninth and tenth centuries, and continuing through the mid-nineteenth century A.D., these trade routes provided pathways for the extensive slave trade to Europe, the Americas, and the African East Coast. This trade decimated families,

villages, tribes, and nations, with as many as 20 million Africans removed from their homes and lands. With slavery as the worst example, African political and economic history since the late 19th century continued to reflect dominance and exploitation by European powers through World War II and then subjugation to Western and East European influences during the Cold War between 1950 and 1989.

The exhaustion of European powers in World War II, as well as the expansion of international pressures for self-determination, provided opportunities for African independence, and a wave of new states began to emerge in the late 1950s—first in Libya, then in West Africa, and, by the early 1960s, across the entire continent. There are now 53 separate and sovereign African nations—making up nearly one-fourth of the membership of the United Nations. The continental population is between 830 million and 900 million people and cannot be estimated with accuracy. Africans speak more than 1,000 languages and dialects, and the population is divided among several thousand family, village, and tribal traditions.

The more one learns about Africa and Africans, the greater seems the enormity of undertaking and pursuing missionary work there. Elder Alexander Morrison of the Seventy wrote in 1990, "In some ways, at least, I believe that establishing the gospel in Africa represents the most difficult challenge the Church has ever had to face."² Without the unbounded faith and complete assurance of the Lord's prophets, it could never be attempted. Several thousand Church members have now served missions on the continent, and they bring firm testimony that the Lord's hand is directing the work. There soon will be a quarter of a million members in Africa spread throughout 17 missions, 45 stakes, and 700 wards and branches. Most of you in this audience were born between 1983 and 1987, and most of the growth of the Church in Africa has happened within your lifetimes. Many of you have

served missions there already, and many more of you will have that blessing in your future.

The work in Africa started, of course, well before your lifetimes. It was always intended in the great plan of God that this last dispensation would be commanded to carry the gospel to “the ends of the earth.” Because of the increased pace of the work, the Church recently passed the inevitable milestone of having more members spread across the world in other countries than we have in the United States.

The 1839 promise to Joseph Smith about “the ends of the earth” came during the latter weeks of the Prophet’s confinement in Liberty Jail. Gravely concerned about his loved ones, aware that the Saints were being harassed and murdered, in desperation he cried out to the Lord:

*O God, where art thou? . . .
How long shall thy hand be stayed? . . .
. . . Stretch forth thy hand. . . .
Let thine anger be kindled against our
enemies; and . . . avenge us of our wrongs.*
[D&C 121:1–2, 4–5]

The Lord’s answer was gentle and reassuring:

*My son, peace be unto thy soul; thine adversity
and thine afflictions shall be but a small moment;
And then, if thou endure it well, God shall exalt
thee on high; thou shalt triumph over all thy foes.*
[D&C 121:7–8]

Then came the unmistakable affirmations in section 122:

*The ends of the earth shall inquire after thy
name, and fools shall have thee in derision, and hell
shall rage against thee. . . .
. . . Know thou, my son, that all these things
shall give thee experience, and shall be for thy good.*
[D&C 122:1, 7]

The Lord’s firm assurance to the Prophet was laden with profound implications for the future of missionary work in the Church. Joseph must have wondered, even if he did not doubt, how the great prophecies and promises made to and through him were to be fulfilled if he were separated from the Church. These questions were put to rest with this prophecy. The Restoration and the gospel message would go forth!

Having received this assurance, how specifically might the Prophet have thought of missionary work across the various nations of the earth? We know that he had thought about and sent missionaries to England in 1837 and 1839 and that he thought about rededicating Palestine for the return of the Jews. He sent Apostle Orson Hyde to Jerusalem to do so in 1841. Might he have thought of eventual missionary work in Asia, South America, or Africa?

In light of known revelation, it cannot be doubted that the Prophet contemplated missionary work throughout the world. However, little was generally known about Africa before his Martyrdom in 1844. Following his death, the responsibility for carrying the gospel message to the ends of the earth passed to his successors, and as soon as President Brigham Young could pursue it, he did so with zeal. By the early 1850s, apostles as special witnesses and other missionaries as well had been sent to open missions in Chile, France, Germany, Gibraltar, Hawaii, India, Malta, Scandinavia, the South Pacific, and Switzerland.³ Professor Dale LeBaron wrote about historical events in 1852 that affected South Africa:

*At a special Church conference in Salt Lake City in
August 1852, . . . President Brigham Young called
106 men to . . . go on missions to various lands. . . .
Three . . . to South Africa: Jesse Haven, William H.
Walker, and Leonard I. Smith, with Elder Haven
assigned to preside. . . . They arrived at the Cape
of Good Hope on April 18, 1853, and set about to*

*establish the Church in South Africa, encouraging the converts to “gather to Zion” in Utah.*⁴

The first missionaries on the African continent—preaching solely to white South Africans—organized branches near Cape Town and in Port Elizabeth, and by 1865, 278 converts to the Church emigrated from South Africa to Utah.⁵ Between 1865 and 1903 no missionaries were on the African continent. Between 1903 and 1940, however, 230 missionaries served until they had to be withdrawn because of World War II. New missionaries returned in 1944 and have been in South Africa ever since.⁶ Until 1978 their work was strictly confined to white South Africans.

Eventually the South Africa Mission was expanded to include what is now called Zimbabwe, and an impressive Church membership of several thousand exceptionally strong and faithful members have since provided exemplary Church leadership. In 1954 President David O. McKay became the first prophet to visit South Africa. In 1970 the first stake there was organized in Johannesburg. And in 1973 President Spencer W. Kimball visited the country and pronounced a special rededicatory prayer for South Africa. Here is some of that inspired prayer:

We come to Thee today . . . to re-dedicate the land, that the people may open their hearts, that the government may open doors, that the things which we teach . . . may reach the great masses of people in this area. . . .

Let peace envelop this land. Bless the leadership of this country. . . .

. . . We look forward to the day, our Father, when all the processes might converge to bring a temple to this land, wherein all the . . . people . . . may have their endowments and the blessings that are available to righteous people. . . . We rededicate [this land] for Thy Holy purposes. . . .

*. . . And [we] ask Thee, our Father, to keep it in mind, to keep it in Thy sight, to never let it be forgotten by Thee.*⁷

This prayer preceded President Kimball’s revelation on the priesthood by four and a half years, yet it includes appeals that the government might open doors, that the message might “reach the great masses of people in this area,” and that peace might envelop the land. And it prophetically calls for a temple wherein *all* the people may have their endowments. South Africa in 1973 was home to some 5 million whites and 35 million blacks. References to “the great masses of people” would clearly include both groups.

On June 1, 1978, the revelation on the priesthood was received in the Salt Lake Temple. President Hinckley spoke of that remarkable and momentous event during a Churchwide fireside commemorating the 159th anniversary of the restoration of the priesthood:

There was a hallowed and sanctified atmosphere in the room. For me, it felt as if a conduit opened between the heavenly throne and the kneeling, pleading prophet of God who was joined by his Brethren. . . .

Every man in that circle, by the power of the Holy Ghost, knew the same thing. . . .

. . . Not one of us who was present on that occasion was ever quite the same after that. Nor has the Church been quite the same. . . .

Tremendous, eternal consequences for millions over the earth are flowing from that manifestation. . . .

. . . This has opened great areas of the world to the teaching of the everlasting gospel. . . .

*We have cause to rejoice . . . that we have seen this glorious day.*⁸

The revelation declares that “all worthy male members of the Church may be ordained to the priesthood without regard for race or color” (Official Declaration 2). While of utmost

importance to the entire world, the foundational importance of this revelation for Africa cannot be misunderstood. Even prior to the opening of missionary work among black West Africans, early contacts had been made, and following the priesthood revelation missionaries were sent there in 1978 authorized to teach, baptize, ordain, and organize. The Africa West Mission began operations on July 1, 1980.

President Kimball had announced at general conference in April 1980 that the Church would build seven new temples. He announced plans for nine more at the next April conference in 1981. Thirteen of the 16 new structures were to be constructed outside the United States. This was the most dramatic acceleration in temple building in the history of the Church until that time. One of the new temples announced in 1981 was to be in South Africa.⁹

Ground in Johannesburg was broken and a site dedicated in late November 1982 by Elder Marvin J. Ashton. The beautiful structure—the first of what will surely be many temples on the African continent—was completed and dedicated by President Hinckley, then second counselor in the First Presidency, on August 24 and 25, 1985. Following is some of what the dedicatory prayer included:

*We pray for peace in this troubled land. Bless this nation which has befriended Thy servants. May those who rule in the offices of government be inspired to find a basis for reconciliation among those who now are in conflict one with another. May the presence of Thy house on the soil of this land bring blessings to the entire nation.*¹⁰

This prayer calling for reconciliation among those in conflict—added to the physical presence of the temple and supported by the steadfast faith and loyalty of a remarkable group of Church members—contributed to historic changes in South Africa’s political and economic status over the ensuing decade. Consider the following:

First, crucially important changes in Eastern Europe in 1988 and 1989 led to a withdrawal of Russian influence in southern Africa, to a departure of Cuban troops from Angola, to a brokered peace ending a long war between South Africa and Angola, and to resolution of major international issues of conflict between South Africa and other nations—both in Africa and elsewhere.

Second, following a half century of a formal policy for separation of races in South Africa known as “apartheid,” the National Party that controlled Parliament and internal security announced significant changes in its policies and elected new leaders in 1989. By February of 1990, state president F. W. de Klerk announced the intention of the government to release Nelson Mandela. A Council for a Democratic South Africa began negotiations leading to a new constitution.

Third, following 300 years of fragmented political, economic, and social relations between races, the first fully democratic election in the history of South Africa took place in April 1994. Though far from problem free, this election and the compromises that led to and followed it transformed South African society.

South Africa has experienced much violence and is far from resolving its problems. Indeed, new challenges have emerged. However, it has passed through a more peaceful revolution than the civil war between the races that was both feared and predicted in the mid-1980s, just as the temple was being dedicated. President Hinckley prayed in 1985 that the presence of the Lord’s house in South Africa would bring blessings to the entire nation, and it surely has!

How has the Church expanded across the continent and what is its present status? There are now Church members in 29 of the 53 African countries. Those 29 nations have an estimated combined population of 570 million—about twice the population of the United States. Church membership in these

countries has grown steadily in the past two decades. By 1995 the Church had grown to 79,000 members in 21 countries. By 2000, membership was 109,000, and by early 2005 it was 203,597, reflecting growth of 87 percent over the previous five years.¹¹

During the 20 years since the dedication of the South Africa temple, the Church in Africa has experienced an increase in membership of nearly 800 percent. It remains true, however, that the current members represent only about four-tenths of 1 percent of the 570 million people in countries with Church branches, and that nearly half of the African countries (24) and one-third of the continent's population (300 million) have yet to have missionaries and develop Church activity. A great work remains to be done!

Still, in some countries, growth has been dramatic. South Africa's membership has tripled to more than 40,000 since 1987. Ghana's membership has doubled to 24,000 in the 10-year period since 1995. And Nigeria's membership has nearly doubled in just five years to 64,000.

Church leaders have established good relationships of mutual respect with governmental, provincial, tribal, religious, and humanitarian-aid officials as aid projects have been instituted and buildings dedicated. Current Ghana president John A. Kufuor met with the First Presidency in Salt Lake City on September 17, 2002, and stated, "We consider you as part of Ghana."¹² In December of 2003 he attended the temple open house with several members of Ghana's parliament.¹³

President Hinckley also stated during his recent trip:

During the last five years, this Church has sent \$77,196,000 [in] aid to Africa. . . .

[The Church has] drilled enough wells to provide enough clean water to 1,083,000 people. . . .

. . . We've also been helping the poor and the needy . . . those in trouble . . . those with diseases. . . . We'll need to do more.¹⁴

The two recent West African temples promise to bring further growth and many additional blessings. As President Hinckley dedicated the Accra Ghana Temple on January 11, 2004, he prayed:

We thank Thee for the brotherhood that exists among us, that neither color of skin nor land of birth can separate us as Thy sons and daughters. . . .

. . . Touch the hearts of the members of the Church in this and surrounding nations. . . . May they be good citizens . . . and may the rulers of these nations be generous toward Thy people and safeguard their liberties. . . .

May Thy work spread in this land and in adjoining nations. . . .

We pray for this nation of Ghana and for all who constitute its government. May it become a model among the nations of this vast continent. May it grow in strength and influence for good. Incline the hearts of its rulers that they may befriend Thy people, even Thy faithful Saints.¹⁵

On the day preceding the dedication, President Hinckley stated in an interview:

This is a great nation . . . where there has been peace and constitutional government for a long time. This nation stands as an example to all of the nations of Africa for its stability and good government. Pray that it may continue.¹⁶

The Aba Nigeria Temple posed special problems associated with obtaining permits, building materials, and professional services, but it was completed just weeks ago and became the 121st dedicated temple in the Church. In President Hinckley's dedicatory prayer on August 7, he prayed:

In the spread of Thy work over the earth, we have in this good land and in other nations of Africa, strong stakes of Zion with disciples of great faith, obedient to Thee, and with a desire to carry eternal truth to many more.

Bless this nation that it may rise in strength and freedom among the nations of Africa. Bless its leaders that they may look with favor upon Thy Saints and safeguard their rights, property, and privileges.

Bless Thy faithful people and keep them from disease and pestilence, from poverty and want, from conflict of any kind, and from political oppression. . . .

We pray for Thy work throughout the earth.¹⁷

During a Church meeting on August 6, President Hinckley told members that the presence of a temple in Nigeria “will make of this a better country, a better nation, a better place to live” and that it will strengthen families.¹⁸ At a news conference the day before the dedication, he said to reporters, “I have confidence that the presence of this temple will become a great blessing to the people of Nigeria. . . . A whole nation will be strengthened.”¹⁹

A wonderful aspect of living during the latter days is that this period is an era of fulfilled prophecy. As the 21st century unfolds rapidly in our view, we see more clearly that prophecies, both ancient and modern, are being fulfilled with such regularity that their miraculous nature is nearly invisible. Such, it seems, is the case with President Hinckley’s recent trip around the world. Is there any other instance in all of history of a single-trip circumnavigation of the world by a living prophet?

The trip is miraculous in a number of ways:

First, that the Lord has preserved and sustained the prophet’s health and strength in this manner.

Second, that the laws and regulations of nations in a high-security age could be so aligned as to permit such a trip.

Third, that the hardware for round-the-world flight exists and is available to the Lord’s prophet.

Fourth, that there are audiences and agenda requiring the presence of the prophet in Vladivostok, Seoul, Taipei, Hong Kong, Delhi, Nairobi, Aba, Rome, and Paris, not to mention Salt Lake City!

In the 21st-century Church there is now a literal capacity for the message of the gospel to be carried electronically to every corner of the earth instantly and for personal visits by the prophet to occur within hours. While there are still “ends of the earth” we have not reached, we have the physical and technological capacity to do so for the first time in the earth’s history. And as missionaries throughout the world teach about the 200th anniversary of the Prophet’s birth, the ends of the earth continue to inquire after his name.

In conclusion, consider the revelation given to Joseph Smith in October of 1831 that is now recorded as section 65 of the Doctrine and Covenants. The Prophet called it “a prayer.” Its words make clear our missionary responsibility for our day and the purposes served as we fulfill it:

The keys of the kingdom of God are committed unto man on the earth, and from thence shall the gospel roll forth unto the ends of the earth . . . until it has filled the whole earth. . . .

Call upon the Lord, that his kingdom may go forth upon the earth, that the inhabitants thereof may receive it, and be prepared for the days to come, in the which the Son of Man shall come down in heaven, clothed in the brightness of his glory, to meet the kingdom of God which is set up on the earth.

Wherefore, may the kingdom of God go forth, that the kingdom of heaven may come.
[D&C 65:2, 5–6]

May each of us fully accept and fulfill our personal and individual role in missionary

work, helping the kingdom of God to roll forth unto the ends of the earth and preparing ourselves and each other for the days to come when the Son of Man will bring the kingdom of heaven and begin His millennial reign. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. “The ends of the earth” is a significant and recurring phrase in both the Old Testament and the Book of Mormon and is prominent in the revelations of the Doctrine and Covenants as well, having been drawn by the Lord from its ancient origins into Restoration scripture through the Prophet Joseph Smith.

It appears 35 times in the Old Testament, beginning with its use by Moses, then by Samuel, Job, David, and Solomon in Psalms and Proverbs, and by Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel, Micah, and Zechariah. Many of the Old Testament references are not related to spreading the gospel but are used to clarify the extensiveness of God’s creations and powers, the completeness of the blessings of salvation to all mankind, and the infinite praise and glory owed to God by His sons and daughters.

The phrase appears only once in the New Testament in connection with the mission of Paul and Barnabas “to be a light of the Gentiles . . . for salvation unto the ends of the earth” (Acts 13:47).

There are 15 references to the phrase in the Book of Mormon, 10 of which are nearly identical to their earlier appearances in Isaiah. As it is used in Mosiah, Alma, 3 Nephi, Mormon, Ether, and Moroni, it defines the scriptural admonition that the gospel message is to be carried unto the ends of the earth.

In modern revelation the phrase “the ends of the earth” is mentioned 19 times, sprinkled across 15 sections of the Doctrine and Covenants beginning with section 1 and extending through section 133. These references are almost entirely directed to the missionary responsibility of the Church.

The Book of Mormon and the Doctrine and Covenants also include the familiar phrase “every nation, kindred, tongue, and people,” which does not appear in either the Old or New Testament. The two phrases clearly are meant to define the full extent of God’s creation.

2. Alexander B. Morrison, *The Dawning of a Brighter Day: The Church in Black Africa* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1990), 3.

3. See Dean B. Cleverly, in Daniel H. Ludlow, ed., *Encyclopedia of Mormonism: The History, Scripture, Doctrine, and Procedure of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 4 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1992), s.v. “Missions: History of Missionary Work,” 2:916–17.

4. E. Dale LeBaron, in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, s.v. “Africa, The Church in,” 1:22.

5. LeBaron, *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 1:23.

6. LeBaron, *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 1:23–24.

7. *Re-Dedicatory Prayer Offered by President Spencer W. Kimball of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints on December 2, 1973, for the Land of South Africa*, pamphlet (Pretoria, South Africa: Isaac Swartzberg, n.d.), 1, 3, 5–6, 7.

8. Gordon B. Hinckley, “Speaking Today: Priesthood Restoration,” *Ensign*, October 1988, 70, 71.

9. See Richard O. Cowan, in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, s.v. “Temples: History of Latter-day Saint Temples from 1831 to 1990,” 4:1454.

10. “Johannesburg South Africa Temple,” *Deseret Morning News Church Almanac* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Morning News, 2005), 518.

11. See *Church Almanac*, 2005, 624–25.

12. John A. Kufuor, quoted in Sarah Jane Weaver, “Ghana President Welcomed in Salt Lake City,” *Church News*, 21 September 2002, 2.

13. See Michael Kirkpatrick and Marged Kirkpatrick, “Ghana Temple Opens,” *Church News*, 6 December 2003, 3; see also Michael Kirkpatrick and Marged Kirkpatrick, “Open House Ends at Accra Temple,” *Church News*, 20 December 2003, 14.

14. Gordon B. Hinckley, quoted in Julie Dockstader Heaps, "Good Impression: Pres. Hinckley Meets Media," *Church News*, 13 August 2005, 7.

15. Gordon B. Hinckley, text of dedicatory prayer of the Accra Ghana Temple given on 11 January 2004, in "Brotherhood Exists," *Church News*, 17 January 2004, 11.

16. Gordon B. Hinckley, quoted in "'Great Nation,' an Example in Africa," *Church News*, 17 January 2004, 10.

17. Gordon B. Hinckley, text of dedicatory prayer of the Aba Nigeria Temple given on 7 August 2005, in "Rise in Strength . . . Among the Nations of Africa," *Church News*, 13 August 2005, 4.

18. Gordon B. Hinckley, quoted in Julie Dockstader Heaps, "Marvelous Miracle to See Growing Church," *Church News*, 13 August 2005, 6.

19. Gordon B. Hinckley, quoted in Julie Dockstader Heaps, "Nigerian Temple to Bring a Healing," *Church News*, 13 August 2005, 3.

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